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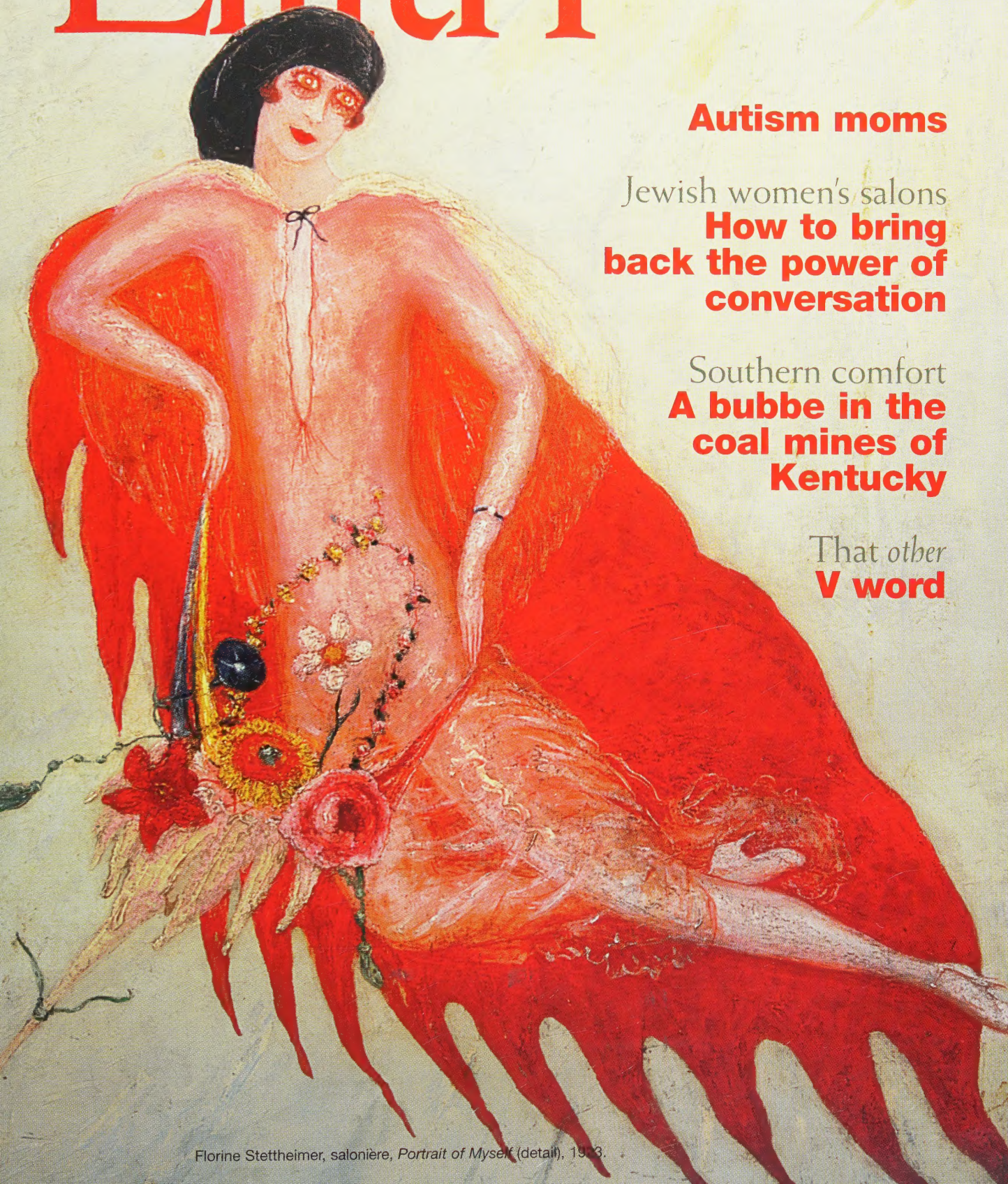

Autism moms

Jewish women's salons
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That *other*
V word

Florine Stettheimer, salonière, *Portrait of Myself* (detail), 1923.

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Why is this magazine called Lilith? In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."

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Individual subscriptions: $21/4 issues
Institutions: $27/4 issues
Canada: add $6/year
Overseas: add $8/year (US funds only)
Single copies: $6, prepaid

Change of address or delivery problems: Send label to LILITH, Dept. LIL,P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834, or call (800) 783–4903 or (212) 757–0818.

Retailers: To carry LILITH, contact BigTop (415) 643-0161 x115, info@bigtoppubs.com

LILITH is published by Lilith Publications, Inc., a non-profit organization.

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ISSN 0146-2334.

LILITH occasionally makes its mailing list available to organizations or publishers. If you do not want to receive such mail, please send label and request to: LILITH, Dept. LIL, PO Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834.

When was the last time you accepted a compliment (about your accomplishments, not your earrings) simply by saying, undefensively, "Thank you"? And, smiling a bit, left it at that. No self-deprecating coda. Admit it—all too frequently we're willing to undermine the work we do, or give the lie to the effort we've put in by downplaying it.

Women are altogether too modest. And I don't mean in our dress, but in certain of our behaviors.

In this context, I've sprung the memory of a particularly goofy incident from my first summer home from college. I had offered to do the cooking for a dinner party my mother was having, and I decided to attempt orange duck, a trick never before assayed in my mother's kitchen. But I, with my newly sophisticated palate, decided I could invent this dish just fine. The details of the adventure are fogged, mercifully, by the mists of history, though I believe marmalade may have been involved. What I do remember was my mother's very clear instruction: If the guests remarked on my culinary effort, I was to say "Oh, it was nothing." "It was nothing," I parroted, after the first *de rigeur* praise from her friends, only to hear my mother announce, "Oh, she was in the kitchen working *all day*."

Why is this paradoxical experience still with me? Because it seems to me a paradigm for a lot of what goes on in our lives decades later. We still feel, in too many cases, that it is somehow impolite to own up to the effort we put into our projects, and to take full credit for their success.

I've been struck by how modest we at Lilith have been about making sure the magazine's intellectual capital—its nearly 30 years of shaping ideas, its wonderful writers and artists and design—gets the recognition it deserves. We are reluctant. We are reluctant—why?—to make sure our intangible contributions are appropriately noted on the balance sheet.

Tangibles aren't easy either. We have been talking with donors about how to acknowledge the people who further Lilith's work with their generous tax-deductible contributions. "You shouldn't make distinctions among women of different capacity. It's so much more feminist that way," offered one woman. How can we reconcile this distinctly female yearning for parity—a flattening of the bell-shaped curve so that more of us fall in the middle—with the truth that unless we highlight women who are exceptions (exceptionally generous, exceptionally good at science) we lose the opportunity to raise the bar for all women?

When Lawrence Summers, president of Harvard University, notoriously remarked recently on women's underrepresentation at the highest levels of science, I thought about the sort of strange regression-to-the-mean that happens in groups of women. It's very difficult to be exceptional because of your accomplishments. It's OK to stand out as the prettiest, the shapeliest, or the wearer of the most gorgeous clothes. But it is still considered a bit immodest to admit to working hard toward explicit, lofty goals. (I don't claim that the orange duck was such a goal, but the dynamic was the same. I tell the story only to underscore how, in ways large and small, we tamp down our own self-pride and try to modulate this quality in others.) We no longer call this "unladylike." We're too highly evolved to do *that*. Instead, we run the risk of thinking that standing out is "anti-feminist"—or, in another lexicon, "elitist."

Don't tamp down **exceptional women**.

If we are serious (and we'd better be) about making sure women are represented in the upper echelons of scientific achievement, and also in politics, the arts, academic life and everywhere else, then we have to appreciate the ones who stand outside of—and above—the norm, better than the rest of us, whether it's in philanthropic giving or in any other endeavor. We can't let these women get away with saying, "Oh, it was nothing." Many a woman, when asked about her career trajectory, answers that chance played a big part. "I was in the right place at the right time." Or, "I never imagined this position would be mine." Well, time to borrow a dictum from Louis Pasteur, a scientist neither Jewish nor female. He said, memorably, "Chance favors the prepared mind."

Plenty of women now have prepared minds. They're ready to move ahead or move up. The emotional intelligence that business-school gurus say makes for the best leaders is a gift women are thought to have in abundance—empathy for others, a thoughtful acknowledgement that our moods affect those around us, a reluctance to toot our own horns. But maybe a charming, self-deprecating modesty that works well for men holds women back from admitting their own strength and capacity. If we're serious about grooming women to assume the leadership of the Jewish world the next generation inherits, we need to see the exceptional women in our midst as deserving of our support, not as aberrations to be pulled back into conforming to the mean.

Susan

Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor-in-Chief

Traditionally, the voice of the Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. **No more.** These pages are for news about Jewish women, **in our own strong voices.**

Jewish Fashion Conspiracy

How do you turn Jewish identity into a hip, national business? **Sarah Lefton,** 31-year-old founder of Jewish Fashion Conspiracy, a sassy clothing design company did it with a decidedly "pro-Semitic" message: "I was working as the marketing director for a camp," says Lefton, "and friends from the office would jokingly pronounce 'Yosemite' as 'Yo, Semite.' I thought, hey, that would make a great t-shirt slogan!"

Lefton started with a $400 investment and sold 36 t-shirts to her friends. As word of mouth spread via the Internet, business exploded, and Lefton created more designs—like her "Jews for Jeter" tee, after the New York Yankees player. "You have no idea how many secret Jewish East Coast baseball fans there are in other cities," says Lefton, "I wore that one to a game in Oakland, and practically every one who walked by was giving me a thumbs-up." Lefton sold over 3,000 shirts last year, sporting slogans like "Bris me, I'm Jewish."

Raised in South Carolina, Lefton says that the small size of the Jewish community where she grew up made her feel her identity more acutely. "Everything I've done has been in response to the feeling of having to work hard to create my own community. That was what I enjoyed so much about this project—wearing an overtly Jewish shirt in San Francisco and having people stop in the streets and ask where I got it. Nobody would have blinked in New York."

While Jewish organizations throughout the country voice concern about assimilation, she says her generation is finding new ways to express cultural identity, from Hasidic reggae and Yiddish rap to organic cotton, fair-trade clothing.

The website proudly claims to be "Putting the 'racy' back in 'conspiracy!'" Asked if selling sexy Jewish underwear has caused any scandal, Lefton responds, "When I made Hanukkah panties—which say 'A great miracle happened here'—I did get a few complaints from religious people who thought it was lashon kodesh—they didn't want holy language on underwear. But most people just think it's a riot."

The next phase? Kvetch 'n'stretch yoga gear. "I went to a yoga retreat and kept meeting people with names like Sudhir Goldberg. I thought, baseball stadiums are full of Jews, and so are yoga studios!" says Lefton. She's currently working on a DVD called "Karaoke Shabbat," using her own brand of humor to teach the sabbath blessings to secular Jews.

But Lefton isn't stopping there. Asked about her long-term business plans, she confesses, "My sister and I talk all the time about opening a hipster-Judaica shop…cool Judaica, not like something my grandmother would have. Yeah, it would be a store, but you could also come for a little Slivovitz and hear an interesting speaker talk about Hanukkah." Manischewitz cocktails, anyone?

You can see Lefton's apparel at www.jewishfashionconspiracy.com.

—Orli Cotel

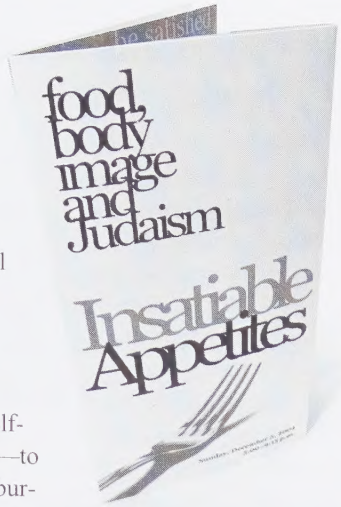
"Unlike civil liberties, human rights is a direct assault on the status quo; it's about how we treat each other, rather than how our governments treat us."

—Madame Justice Rosalie Silberman Abella, *renowned Canadian human-rights jurist, who has been appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada. Quoted in the Yale Daily News.*

Highest-Ranking Woman Says Goodbye

Hannah Rosenthal, one of only three women ever to head a major Jewish organization that's not exclusively female, has resigned as executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA). Rosenthal, who since 2000 had led this national community relations organization, left to become executive director of the Chicago Foundation for Women. A Democrat who served as Midwest regional director of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under Clinton, Rosenthal has been a vocal proponent of anti-poverty programs, and a critic of faith-based initiatives and tax cuts. These positions, which Rosenthal has equated with Jewish values of social justice, may have rubbed some in the Jewish Federation world the wrong way. According to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, **James Tisch,** president and CEO of Loews Corporation and former chair of the United Jewish Communities, one of JCPA's major funding sources, had complained that social welfare issues fell outside the realm of Jewish communal concerns.

Serving up Judaism as soul food



Did the biblical heroine Hannah, mother of Samuel, whose story we revisit each Rosh Hashanah, suffer from anorexia nervosa? Yes, according to **Lori Hope Lefkovitz,** professor of gender and Judaism at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and opening speaker at "Insatiable Appetites: Food, Body Image, and Judaism," a program at Hebrew College in Newton, Massachusetts in December.

Lefkovitz linked Hannah's refusal to eat—self-starvation being a known inhibitor of ovulation—to her inability to get pregnant. Once Hannah "unburdens herself emotionally," Lefkovitz said, she is finally able to eat, and then to conceive. With this reinterpretation, Lefkovitz rendered a woman's triumph over anorexia nervosa biblically visible, offering it as a lesson in healing and hope. Lefkovitz acknowledged that this reading is by no means traditional. Which was exactly her point.

"What we discover in our past depends, in no small part, on what we are looking for," she said. Yes, Jewish women and girls too often internalize damaging cultural stereotypes lurking not only in the dominant culture, but also in Judaism itself. But, she insisted, that can change. "Critical reading puts us in a position to reinterpret that which is problematic, and to reclaim what we discover that is worthy, useful, and even redemptive," Lefkovitz said. "Our task is to expose and exorcise negative stereotypes and popularize a new reality for Jewish women."

Subsequent speakers continued the thread begun by Lefkowitz, that is, that Judaism is a powerful tool in the prevention and healing of eating disorders. **Alison Adler,** a rabbinical student, discussed her use of traditional sources for the workshops that she conducts on eating, body image, and Judaism. Among the sources she refers to are Jewish blessings ("Blessed are you, our God, the sovereign of all worlds, who shaped the human body with wisdom, making for us all the openings and vessels of the body"), the Psalms ("You open up your hand, and satisfy the desire of every living thing." Psalm 145:16) and the Torah ("When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you" Deut. 8:10).

"In Judaism, the body is the temple of the soul," Adler said. When the culture says otherwise, "women need to tell their daughters, 'I will fight the culture.'"

—Jeri Zeder

Our Mother Mary, Found

Beth Grossman, a San Francisco artist who integrates stories and history into her work, has launched a project on Mary, hardly a common figure in Jewish art.

She explains: "During the year 2000 I lived in Italy. I was surrounded by the images and ideals of the Virgin Mary which are woven into the fabric of Italian culture. My initial response to the iconography of Mary was to question the ways that Western culture has shaped, and been shaped for centuries by the images of this one Jewish woman. Our Mother Mary Found re-contextualizes the story of Mary by asserting her Jewish origin as part of her identity. My project revisits the story of Mary, who is the iconic "Madonna"—the idealization of perfect womanhood—always a mother, forever gentle and virtuous.

"This body of work consists of ten rustic wooden household tools I collected during my stay in Italy that correspond to fragments of Mary's life. Each object is illuminated with three gilded lines of text taken from an 18th century Italian Jewish prayer book for women. One line is written in Hebrew, and subsequently repeated in Italian and English. The wooden objects are also adorned with a pair of gold-leafed hands drawn from historical paintings of the Virgin Mother."

www.bethgrossman.com

"We're there for the long haul. We were there before the tsunami and we'll be there long after."

*—**Ruth W. Messinger,** president and executive director of American Jewish World Service, after meeting with President **George W. Bush** to discuss tsunami relief. For years, AJWS has partnered with non-governmental, community-based organizations in South Asia on sustainable community development projects.*

"The most sensitive part of a man's anatomy is his pocketbook."

*—Israeli attorney **Sharon Shenhav** on the Jerusalem family-court ruling ordering a man to pay his wife nearly $100,000 for the "pain, suffering, social isolation" and inability to remarry or have more children after he spent 12 years denying her request for a get [Jewish divorce]. Reported by **Michele Chabin** in New York's Jewish Week newspaper.*

"Gay rights are a natural extension of Jewish feminism"

In January, the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly (RA) threatened to expel—but in the end only censured—one of its members, **Rabbi Ayelet S. Cohen.** The reason, according to the RA, was Cohen's violation of a procedure regarding serving synagogues not affiliated with the movement. But the real reason for the threatened expulsion, according to Cohen and some of her Conservative colleagues, is because Cohen has since 2002 served Congregation Beth Simchat Torah (CBST) in New York, the world's largest gay and lesbian synagogue. The senior rabbi, **Sharon Kleinbaum,** is a highly visible activist for gay rights. CBST is unaffiliated with any movement, although Kleinbaum approached United Synagogue about Conservative affiliation in 2002 after hiring Rabbi Cohen. Kleinbaum was told, according to news reports, that CBST was not eligible. Openly gay and lesbian Jews cannot be admitted to Conservative rabbinical schools, and the movement does not sanction commitment ceremonies.

Rabbi Ayelet S. Cohen officiating at a commitment ceremony.

Cohen, who is heterosexual, told Lilith that her choice to serve CBST in 2002 met with a lot of resistance from those in the Conservative movement who, in Cohen's words, "don't want to have this conversation." But the movement, with a longtime commitment to both tradition and change, is by no means monolithic on this issue. When Cohen was threatened with expulsion, eight prominent Conservative rabbis wrote a letter to the RA in her support, in which they expressed their dismay at how their movement's stated position was alienating gays and lesbians and their families. The Conservative committee on Jewish law is scheduled to meet in April specifically to revisit the issue of homosexual Jews for the first time since 1992.

"The Conservative movement and its schools have lost some wonderful people over this," says Cohen. "Not only gay and lesbian people, but others who don't want to be associated with the Conservative position." Whereas, she says, other movements, specifically the Reform and Reconstructionist, both of which condone commitment ceremonies and ordain openly gay and lesbian Jews, "are thriving." Asked whether she had ever considered ordination in these more liberal denominations, Cohen said that choosing the Jewish Theological Seminary had been a hard decision for her.

"I grew up in the Conservative movement. I connect deeply to its stated values, a Judaism grounded in Jewish law and contemporary historical reality. And I've been deeply troubled by their position on gay and lesbian Jews," said Cohen. "Too often we hear people talk about 'gay issues,' but not 'gay people.' But this is not a theoretical issue. It's an issue of social justice and the major civil rights issue of this generation. That's why I'm so committed to right this wrong."

Cohen also said that as a woman Conservative rabbi, she sees a lot of parallels between today's struggle for gay rights within the movement and the fight for the ordination of women 20 years ago.

"I see this issue as a natural extension of Jewish feminism," Cohen said. "This is the idea that I grew up with: that Judaism should be fully accessible to all of us."

—Alice Sparberg Alexiou

Palestinian Women Make Gains

In municipal elections that took place two weeks before Palestinians elected **Mahmoud Abbas** as President of the Palestinian Authority in January, women made out surprisingly well, winning 51 seats in 26 localities. Candidates had to struggle hard against the Arab world's long-ingrained preconception that women belong at home, not in the public sphere. Teacher **Maisoun Adarneh,** 44, elected to the town council of Yabed, in the West Bank, told the Associated Press that she ran for office "to show support for women and their right to be part of the decision-making process." She stressed the significance of her and her female colleagues' victories, in a society where "women are oppressed and have no voice."

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Remembering Susan Sontag

APF PHOTO

On December 28 2004, writer **Susan Sontag,** 71, died of cancer in New York City. Her edgy eloquence combined with her oversized ego made her one of the twentieth century's most important and infuriating cultural critics. In her many books and essays she tackled a wide range of subjects, among them imperialism ("the white race…is the cancer of human history….") and the definition of camp ("a woman walking around in a dress made of three million feathers"). One of Sontag's most influential works was *Illness as Metaphor*, a trenchant account of her fight against breast cancer, which she first developed in the 1970s. Sontag was also a human rights activist who unapologetically voiced strong opinions that often contradicted whatever she'd recently said on the same subject, thereby offending just about everybody at one time or another. She visited Israel during the Six-Day War, and in 2001 she received the Jerusalem Prize, Israel's most prestigious literature award. At the awards ceremony, Sontag criticized Israel and called for the dismantling of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza.—*A.S.A.*

"I Had an Abortion."

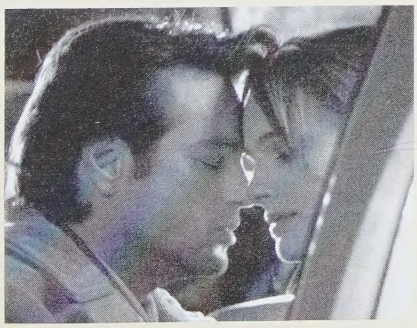
When Planned Parenthood began selling t-shirts bearing the slogan "I had an abortion," conservative journalists and bloggers were quick to publish their reactions. But missing, as usual, were the voices of women who have actually had abortions, both before and after *Roe*, which is exactly what the "I Had an Abortion Project" seeks to remedy. The t-shirts were sold in conjunction with a documentary film of the same name by **Jennifer Baumgardner**, co-author of *Grassroots: A Field Guide to Feminist Activism* (reviewed in this issue), and **Gillian Aldrich,** a field producer for "Bowling for Columbine." A photographer, **Tara Todras-Whitehill,** did portrait shots of the women wearing the "I had an abortion" shirts. (Film info and t-shirts are available from soapboxinc.com). Blunt and powerful, the women in the film talk about their experiences, from the 1940s to last year. The truth is not always easy to hear—one woman even states that she feels she killed her child—but at last women's own stories are driving the discussion, and not simply the rhetoric of male politicians.

—*Miriam Stone*

"A Missouri student reports that **her school refused to let her write a paper about abortion.** A Planned Parenthood employee in Minnesota says that she **never mentions where she works**... A college freshman in Wisconsin would consider an abortion. But, she says, **she would never tell anyone about it.** Anti-choice protesters have not won the day or the majority, but they have managed to **close off intelligent discourse.**"

—**Cindy Cooper,** *creator of "Words of Choice," a play about reproductive rights now touring the U.S.; from an article in* Women's eNews *on the 32nd anniversary of Roe v. Wade.*
womensenews.org
wordsofchoice.net

Natalie Portman Reconnects With Her Israeli Roots



REUTERS/GIL COHEN MAGEN

Jerusalem-born film actress **Natalie Portman**, 23, who won hearts for her role in last year's "Garden State" and was nominated for an Oscar for her performance in "Closer," returned to Israel this winter to star in "Free Zone," a film directed by **Amos Gitai.** "I think it's an amazing time for Israeli cinema," Portman, who studied at Hebrew University in Jerusalem last year, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. "It is just starting to flower and I think, you know, I wanted to be part of that." "Free Zone," like Gitai's other movies, explores a controversial subject—in this case, Israeli-Palestinian coexistence. Filming locations included the West Bank and Jordan, where, in the wake of the recent cease-fire declaration by Israelis and Palestinians, all remained peaceful. But not so at Jerusalem's Western Wall. There, the Associated Press reported, an angry crowd of ultra-Orthodox worshippers heckled Portman and her hunky co-star **Aki Avni** (pictured at left with Portman) as the two stood in front of the Wall kissing during the shooting of a scene. The action became so heated that the police intervened.

"Along the way, the **working class, socialist, grass-roots underpinnings of the holiday fell away** and the focus in the United States largely became the achievements of individual women."

—***Louise Bernikow*** *on the "The Birth of Women's History Month" in Women's eNews* ***womensenews.org***

IBD: A Jewish Disease

For 18 years, I have lived with ulcerative colitis, an inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) that often runs in Jewish families. The symptoms—a chronic sense of urgency, bloody diarrhea, fever, dehydration—are not constant, but randomly come and go. During the many years when I endured severe flare-ups, I reluctantly considered a nearby hospital my second home. Since the age of 17 when I first developed the disease, I would sometimes stop by the emergency room for a short stint to subdue flare-up symptoms quickly with intravenous steroids. But usually I would spend more than a week in the hospital while doctors tried to induce remission of my symptoms.

IBD has been categorized as "familial," which means there is no guarantee that I'll pass it on to the next generation. According to the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America (CCFA), one million Americans have IBD, equally divided between two forms—Crohn's, a disease that afflicts the digestive tract anywhere from the mouth to the anus, and colitis, which causes inflammation in the large bowel. Doctors have known for 30 years of the prevalence of inflammatory bowel disease in the Jewish population, and particularly in Ashkenazi Jews. According to **Dr. David Rubin,** a gastroenterologist at the University of Chicago Hospital, the incidence among Ashkenazi Jews is five times higher than that of the non-Jewish Caucasian population. Researchers have recently detected at least five genes associated with Crohn's, said Rubin, who hopes more genetic studies will be carried out.

Although I've had colitis for half my life, I have managed to avoid surgery. Medications have controlled my flare-ups. But I know many others, especially those with Crohn's, who have not been so fortunate. **Miranda Gold,** for one, a social worker in New York City who has undergone four surgeries.

"I think I'm a medical miracle. I have about a foot of intestine left," she said. Surgeons have cut a total of more than 20 feet from Gold's small intestine over 15 years. Each operation attempts to remove inflamed sections, but at the reconnection point inflammation often recurs, therefore necessitating further surgeries.

Miranda and I have both been fortunate to develop close relationships with people who understand our disease. I recently married a man to whom I disclosed and described my symptoms early in our relationship. He's been sensitive to my potentially embarrassing moments. While we haven't had to make trips to the hospital together, I have had minor flare-ups that have necessitated his pulling the car over fast, so that I could get to a rest room in a hurry. Crohn's is a real test of any deep relationship. **Arthur Freeman**, an assistant social worker and friend of Miranda's since childhood, has learned a lot about Crohn's disease through her. Searching out a bathroom in every location in advance becomes routine, he said. Worrying about not finding the bathroom on time or leaving it with unpleasant smells creates a constant sense of embarrassment for many people with this disease.

"To use the bathroom once a day is one thing," Arthur said, "but to have to use it 28 times a day is another. It just sets you up for shame, I think at the deepest level. Humans do not want to smell bad. To have a disease that has to do with elimination is categorically different than having, say, a respiratory disease where there's no shame."

—*Deborah Pardo-Kaplan*

For more information about IBD and genetics go to: www.ccfa.org or Jewishgeneticscenter.org.

New adoption rights in Israel

In an important decision for gay rights in Israel, the Supreme Court in December ruled 7-to-2 that **Tal** and **Avital Yaros-Hakak,** a lesbian couple who have lived together for 15 years and have three sons conceived through artificial insemination, can legally adopt each other's children. Two lower courts had granted the women legal guardianship but had rejected their bid for adoption. Judges warned, however, that the ruling, based on the welfare of the children, was specific to this case and is not meant to set a precedent. Reactions to the decision were, predictably, split. A spokesman for the National Religious Party called the decision "an affront to Jewish family values," but parties to the left of center praised the decision. Israeli law does not recognize gay marriage.

Illustration from *My Depression, A Picture Book*, by **Elizabeth Swados** (Hyperion, April 2005). Through the author's whimsical drawings, readers get a unique view of the experience of depression—from the struggle to keep her condition a secret, to the strange effects of "new" drugs, to the small things that can trigger relapses. It's an evocative, readable, and engaging story of an illness that is finally gaining widespread attention.

"They can tell when they have your full attention and care, and when you are writing a sermon in your head or stewing over a problem at work."

—***Rabbi Janet Marder,*** *president of the Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis, in a speech to women rabbis on finding balance between personal life and the rabbinate, a calling which "demands such profound giving" all of the time.*

Letter from Kigali

The film "Hotel Rwanda" tells some of the horrors of the conflict between the Hutus and the Tutsis in Rwanda, which in 1994 exploded in a bloodbath that left nearly a million people dead, countless others raped and mutilated. ***Lisa Goldstein,*** *21, a student at Johns Hopkins studying in Uganda, visited Rwanda recently. She sent this letter by email:*

The genocide memorial in Kigali, Rwanda, documents the buildup to the 1994 atrocities. It reminds me of Yad Vashem, of Germany in the 1930s: identity cards, propaganda against the Tutsis, discrimination. Things the world should have known to be on the lookout for, should have known would lead to mass killings, but did nothing to stop. The museum also gives an overview of the genocides in the twentieth century: Bosnia, Cambodia, the Holocaust, Namibia. It made me wonder how many times we're going to say "never again." Yet at the same time I also felt astounded at peoples' ability to bounce back—at least on the surface.

Looking out over the city from the hilltop where the memorial stands, I could see no obvious evidence of destruction. But I did see cars along roads, people on bikes, shops with customers. At the same time, Rwandans acknowledge their horrendous history. They know that Rwandans committed these crimes against each other, and now must deal with the effects. Rwandans do not say "it was those Hutus, those other people, who did these things to the Tutsis." No, they say "Rwandans did this to Rwandans."

Rwandan prisons are now holding 120,000 people on genocide charges. Defendants are brought to trial in the communities where they allegedly committed their crimes. The accused sit before a panel of nine judges and a community council; there are no lawyers on either side. The community makes a case for the guilt or innocence of the person on trial, based on eyewitness accounts and the defendant's own testimony. The crimes of genocide were committed so publicly, then so flaunted, that there are always some corroborating witnesses. This form of communal justice forces the perpetrators to go back to the community that they devastated. There have been many confessions. All convictions are recorded with the name of the guilty party as well as the phrase "and the government," because genocide in Rwanda was truly a state-sponsored phenomenon. The objective of the court system is to enable the Rwandans to live together as neighbors again: the guilty must be punished, but must then be integrated back into society. This is especially true for the convicted who are very young. There is an understanding of "collective madness" here, and a willingness to forgive what is unbelievable.

www.Lilith.org

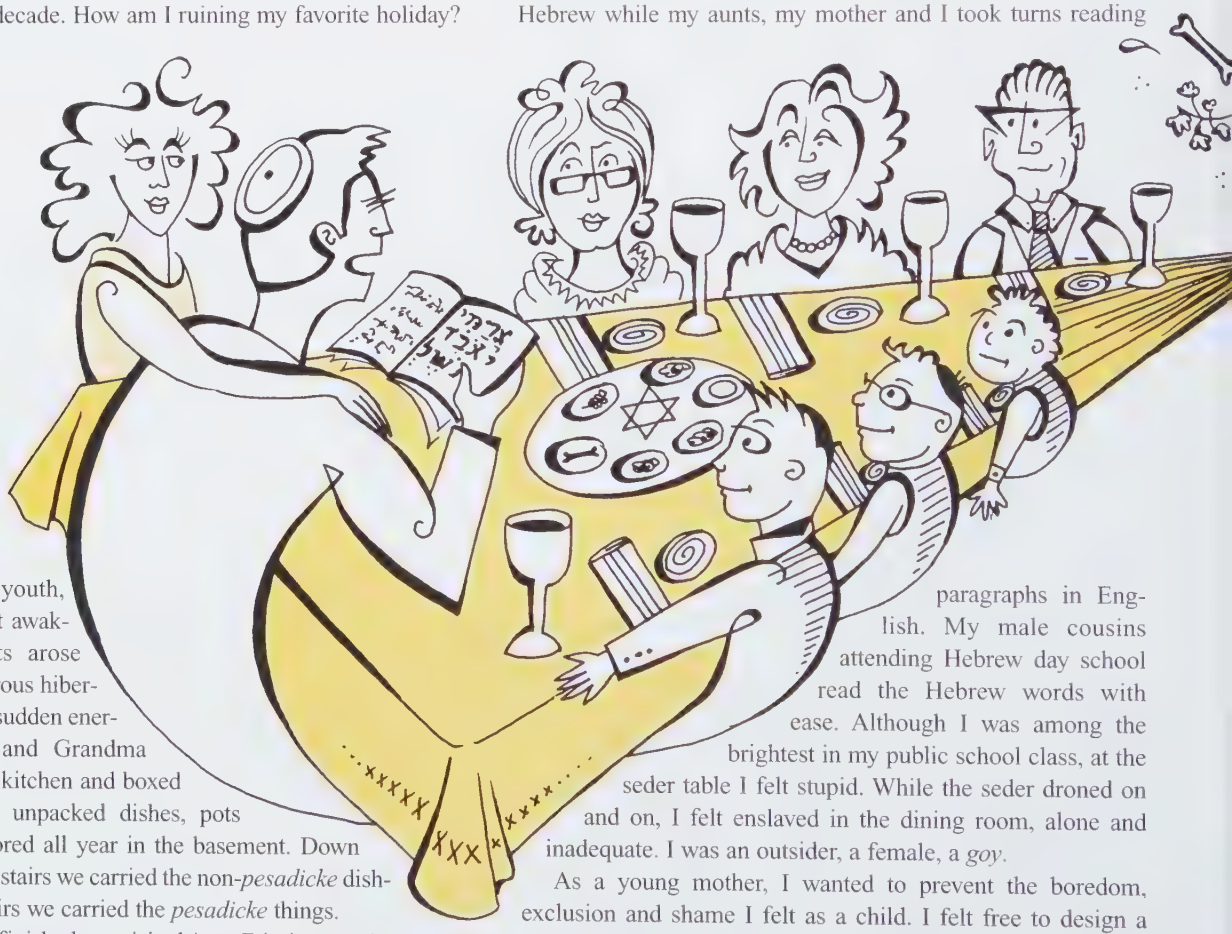
9,000 Dishes, 120 Seders, 60 Years
Hey! I Could Get Into This!

by Barbara M. Stock

The good years, the angry years, the anxious years, and now—the triumphal years

Theoretically, I love Passover. Through gray Chicago winters, I yearn for it. On the first day of the year, I flip ahead in the calendar to see if it falls in March or April. Secretly, I hope it will be February. But as Pesach draws near, I am overwhelmed with anxiety.

The emotion feels familiar, but uncomfortable and irrational. I take the time to really feel the stress: tightened jaw, flippy stomach. What is my problem? I've "done" Pesach for more than 30 years. I've cleaned out *chometz* [leavened food products]. I've cooked seder meals. I've even led seders for more than a decade. How am I ruining my favorite holiday?



In my youth, Pesach meant awakening. Adults arose from a stuporous hibernation. With sudden energy, Mother and Grandma scrubbed the kitchen and boxed *chometz*. We unpacked dishes, pots and silver stored all year in the basement. Down the basement stairs we carried the non-*pesadicke* dishes; up the stairs we carried the *pesadicke* things.

When we finished, we visited Aunt Frimi to watch as she and my cousins completed the same traditional tasks. Then, Grandma and Aunt Frimi began cooking round-the-clock–chicken soup, *tzimmis*. In wooden bowls, they chopped onions and whitefish. My memory can't be accurate, but in every image the sun shines. *Shehechiyanu*—Grandma's joy of surviving another winter, cooking into another spring, was contagious. With daffodils blooming and Pesach inside, I felt newly born.

In my childhood, no one re-thought the seder. We followed the Maxwell House Hagada. Word for word for word. I don't remember seeing any other version. Women rabbis and cantors did not exist. The men and boys sat at one end with Zayde presiding. The women sat near the kitchen. Zayde mumbled Hebrew while my aunts, my mother and I took turns reading paragraphs in English. My male cousins attending Hebrew day school read the Hebrew words with ease. Although I was among the brightest in my public school class, at the seder table I felt stupid. While the seder droned on and on, I felt enslaved in the dining room, alone and inadequate. I was an outsider, a female, a *goy*.

As a young mother, I wanted to prevent the boredom, exclusion and shame I felt as a child. I felt free to design a child-friendly seder. I made snacks to eat before beginning and inserted songs so none of the children would be bored. My husband would lead a very abbreviated version that the children

My husband and I divorced, and suddenly I was a single head of household. Seder threw me into deep depression.

I cleaned, I cooked, I cried.

could follow. As a hostess, I emulated Aunt Frimi. I reveled in the sensuality of scrubbing out winter and welcoming spring. I set out colorful bouquets of tulips and daffodils. I cooked fragrant soups, flourless desserts. Happily, I prepared beautiful, bountiful, peaceful meals set on fine linens. My husband led the seder while I sat proudly at his side.

Then, almost 25 years ago, my world changed. My husband and I divorced. I was suddenly a single head of household. The seder, always an important family occasion, threw me into deep depression. I cleaned, I cooked, I cried. We would have no seder at home. That first year their father took the children for first night, and I took them to a friend's home for second night. And so a new tradition developed: first night with father, second night with me at friends' homes. It never occurred to me to host the seder myself.

Then one year, at the last moment—the very day of the first seder—their father called to say he would not take our three boys. In a panic I called my first-night hostess who said, "Bring the boys and your pot of soup. We have plenty." I vowed I would never again be caught without a plan for first-night seder. In my anger, I decided that the following year I would do first night myself.

The challenge was finding guests. My friends liked to do their own first-night seders. The children's Jewish friends all neeeded to attend their family seders. So the boys each invited one close non-Jewish friend. *"Remember you were a stranger in the land of Egypt.... Welcome the stranger into your home."* I couldn't imagine anything stranger than one mother leading a seder for six boys ranging in age from six to 14.

I cooked the chicken soup and *knaidlach*, *tzimmis* and brisket just like Grandma, but I set no crystal or china, nothing breakable. Grandma's candlesticks and my seder plate were the only familiar items I dared set out. I served white grape juice to prevent stains. The guests arrived promptly at five, dressed in their church clothes: khakis, navy sports jackets and dark ties. Clearly my sons had prepared each friend for a Major Event.

We explained everything. The boys' excitement escalated. They asked questions about the candlesticks, the matzah cover, the hagadas. They loved the idea of the pillows and almost fell off their seats reclining like kings. The *afikoman* search was a free-for-all. The guests learned the choruses of "Had Gadya" and "Dayenu" and sang with gusto. Parents arrived for their very boisterous children around eight o'clock.

"That was the best seder ever," the boys hugged me and each other as I, suddenly very tired, closed the door behind the guests. "Let's do it that exact same way every year, OK?"

Everyone was excited but me. I missed Aunt Frimi's traditional seder. Not only did I want the crystal, china and silver, I wanted a man to lead the service. Raised as the first-born daughter in a first-generation American home of the 1940s, I could have been the poster child for Good Girl. I made straight As in academics and attitude, volunteered to help others and at night dreamed of growing up to marry and have children.

And then the world changed, with me on the cusp. I read Betty Friedan. I entered graduate school. I received my Ph.D. when my oldest son was four. I was a pioneer Super-Mom, trying to balance career and children. And I had become Super Super-Mom, divorced, single-parenting three sons while working full-time. I didn't ask for the job. I had to do what I had to do. But I didn't have to lead a seder. It had been thrust on me by necessity, and having done it once I did not want to do it again.

I was surprised by the strength of my feeling. Quite consciously, I abandoned my right to lead the seder.

Over the years that followed, we were invited to first night at the home of Orthodox friends, a Conservative rabbi, a Humanistic family. Eventually I began dating, and the man of the season was always happy to lead the seder.

But then, after having grappled with the terror and shame of divorce, I began to enjoy the autonomy of single life. I meditated. I exercised. I bought a stick-shift car to force myself to focus. Slowly I developed confidence. I had a lot to learn. I began finding my voice, voicing my findings. As spring approached almost 20 years ago, I again decided to lead my own seder.

I had to do what I had to do.
But I did not have to lead a seder.
I wanted a man to lead it.

That Pesach was my first really stressful one. The house sparkled. The food was scrumptious. But the chutzpah of leading the seder still unnerved me. My shoulders tightened, my back ached, my palms sweated profusely. As leader, I no longer felt inadequate as I had at Aunt Frimi's table. But I felt bossy. I wanted more discussion, more participation, more *something*. I had replaced the authoritarian seder Zayde led with an authoritarian female leader. I felt dissatisfied.

Then another unimaginable event: the house caught fire. For four months we lived in a hotel. By Pesach, the renovation was complete. Spring. Newly wired, newly painted…the *chometz* of our past life had gone up in flames. As I re-read the hagada, I began to see Pesach as a metaphor for a personal journey. I had been freed of the burden of trying to maintain a 100-year-old house without sufficient funds. The insurance had freed us to update the house properly. And my months of arguing with insurance representatives and contractors had strengthened my voice. I had been freed from a marriage that wasn't working, freed from a job that was too much work.

That Pesach marked a turning point. I took ownership of the ceremony. I read a variety of hagadas, choosing poetry and readings. I explored the idea of moving out of an automatic set of rituals. Everyone raised questions. Everyone sat for hours to discuss. Everyone sang, with transliterations, in the spirit of the fifth cup of wine.

Then I attended a women's seder and discovered female role models. I was no longer alone. I felt connected to a community of women all searching for meaning. I started checking the synagogue gift shop and local bookstores annually for new material. This year, the elderly saleswoman at the Orthodox bookstore surprised me by showing me several feminist hagadas, suggesting I take them home to peruse at leisure. "I think you'll like them all," she smiled.

Each year I include new interpretations and symbols. This year I set the table with an Israeli cup of spring water for Miriam, an Ethiopian matzah cover, daffodils for my son's friend who died. My mother, living in a nearby retirement home, explains the history of her father's silver cup for Elijah. The hagada is cut and pasted with sections entitled "What kind of G-d is this?" and "Is this story true?" It includes a reading by Martin Luther King, Jr., 10 plagues that we perpetrate against our planet, a page by Julius Lester about slavery.

"My mother's seder is not like any other you'll ever attend," my adult son proudly tells our guests as they settle into their pillowed chairs. Over the years, we have welcomed neighbors and friends, Catholics, Buddhists, atheists, Russians, Filipinos Jewish friends whose children are now grown and out of town.

As I observe myself this year, I realize I'm not anxious about the cleaning or the cooking or serving. I have fully internalized the feminine from Grandma and Aunt Frimi. My stress from the pressure of owning the masculine, of designing and leading a meaningful seder, has dissipated. Like our ancestors, I have been on a journey I didn't want. I seem to have traveled from angry-and-passive participant, to happy hostess, to angry-and-determined leader, to reluctant-and-uncomfortable leader, to active-and-creative leader. I have become free to be more of who I am every year, integrating all the parts, masculine and feminine

Planning the hagada modifications well in advance has given me the time to read and reflect without pressure. I realize the seder is a vehicle through which I present my values, my belief in questioning and in growth, my love of evolving Jewish traditions, my trust in a Power well beyond myself. At the seder table, I aim to form a community from strangers of varying backgrounds. I work to create an experience that challenges the ignorance that led to hatred and pogroms. We use the service to reflect on personal fears and celebrate various levels of freedom—political, gendered, personal. I had no idea the seder meant so much to me. No wonder I stressed!

As I set my crystal, Aunt Frimi, *aleha ha-sholom* [peace be upon her], is right by my side, still a bit askance at my chutzpah. The candles now shine from two sets of tall silver candlesticks—my grandmother's and the same ones Aunt Frimi used. After appetizers, I relax into the pillow on my chair and begin the seder, trusting my guests to open their hearts. ●

Barbara M. Stock is a psychologist in private practice in Evanston, Illinois. Long ago a stringer for the suburban Chicago Tribune, she is now a freelance writer.

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How to Make Next Passover's Seder More Meaningful, Starting Now

by Rabbi Susan Schnur

Passover is a journey towards wholeness, towards a metaphoric "promised land," and if we remember that—and that alone—we will create a seder each year that is not only deeply meaningful but, de facto, different from every other year's. For next year's seder, start now by staying attuned to issues in your own life—and in the news—that feel like they speak to this holy journey. My *minhag* [custom] is to assign "spiritual homework" to all our Passover guests several weeks before the *hag* [holiday] that addresses that year's "freedom" issues, public and/or private.

The year after 9/11, for example, was full of destruction, so I sent out this homework: "Imagine you are Moses taking leave of a mutilated world to trudge across the desert. Your 40-year plan is to resocialize a tribe, to create a new, improved version of humanity that will spread crucial societal corrections throughout the land. This tribe will have a bone-deep understanding of why democracy, respect, justice and compassion are simply the way to go. What one item do you, as Moses, need to pack in your L.L. Bean duffel bag in order to best accomplish this task? What one thing will most help us transform ourselves—and one another—from being miserable human beings who are enslaving and enslaved, territorial and selfish, into human beings who create, *l'havdil*, a world that is safe and wise and takes care of everybody?"

Bring an object smaller than a matzah box, I asked our guests (as I do each year), that represents what you believe is essential to pack for this 11th-hour journey towards survival and mutual stewardship.

Bring an object, smaller than an S.U.V.

Among many astonishing objects—and complex discussion—was a teenager's guitar pick. "I practiced two hours a day this year," he said, "and I went from being a rotten guitar player to somebody who won a competition. If I was Moses, this pick would remind me that people can get tons better; they just have to really work on it."

The next year, new books by Barbara Ehrenreich and David Shipler prompted me to see the ethical question of our time as the "working poor"—minimum-wage earners who simply cannot get by. I connected this loosely to Exodus 5:6-18 wherein the Egyptian taskmasters add "straw-gathering" to the slaves' brick-making tasks, yet still expect them to produce the same number of bricks! Several teachers who were at our seder spoke emotionally about their own increased "straw-gathering": shrinking public school resources, the ever-increasing intrusion of standardized tests. One guest had put a piece of chalk on the table. "It's the 'last straw,'" she said. "This year teachers actually have to provide their own chalk."

This year I was struck by the problem of "overwork"—that few folks, in most households, are taking care of the hearth fires anymore, and how this diminishes the succor we once derived from sitting in front of them. Though life's more quantitative values—health, longevity, shelter, food—are wildly improved over the past, so many folks I know are, well, dissatisfied or depressed. **"Bring an object, smaller than an S.U.V.,"** I told my sederees, "that speaks to this sense of 'lost freedom' in your life." One guest placed a cell-phone on the table which rang in the middle of *Dayeinu*. He answered and carried on an intrusive conversation. It took us a minute to realize that he had staged the moment; he had secretly called himself, and was demonstrating the problem.

I don't know what this year ahead of us will bring, but I already have in my consciousness the task of beginning the journey. And as with any really successful spiritual path, its direction will define not only next year's unfolding hagada but also all of our days until we get there.

Sanctuary

by Sarah Antine

So many doves huddled
in that wall,
pushing themselves in.
Ancient lime stones rubbed smooth, beseeching
hands find their comfort. Handwritten
and folded, what the heart

inscribes, hidden graffiti crying songs of smoke.
Brambles between cracked yellowing
stone, in this heat
like clusters of barbed wire, hanging
the laundry of white lace flowers
torn from a notebook, carries the sweat
of hands
wrinkled upturned,
shy smile of asking, giving
unlocks the burden of not

giving. Carefully taped pages
in piles of wind flipped books, *Tehillim, Siddurim,*
open sanctuary of ruins, facing the only wall,
Calling
for return.

Sarah Antine
teaches at Winston Preparatory School and lives in Manhattan.

Kentucky Coal Mine Bubbe

by Maya Bernstein

My grandmother still has traces of her southern accent. When she was a teenager she moved with her family from Evarts, Kentucky--in Harlan County, thick in the heart of mining country--to Brooklyn. She still tells about a date with a boy she really liked, who [[he]] took her to a party. She remembers that she wore a flower in her hair. And if that weren't enough to make her stand out, she went over to the hosts at the end of the party and said, "thank y'all very much for invitin' me to your pahhty." A few years later, when she became friends with one of the girls who had hosted the party, she learned that the real fun began after she had left. They walked around imitating her, "thank y'all very much for invitin' me to your pahhty." Not only did she have a southern accent—those northerners weren't even used to people saying thank you!

Her father had a Russian accent; her mother's accent was Polish. They spoke to one another in Yiddish, and in Kentucky their four children, growing up playing with the miner's kids, spoke a thick southern English.

My great-grandfather, Hillel Appleman, known in this country as Harry, and, many years later, as "Kabu" to his grandchildren, left Russia in 1911, escaping pogroms and poverty. His parents sent him, oldest of 8, to earn money in America, and send it back to them so that they could eventually escape as well. He crossed the Atlantic in steerage class. He was seasick the entire time, from the Motherland to the Home of the Free.

Kabu could not find a job. He was too skinny, too weak. They wouldn't even let him pluck chickens. He tried day after day to get by on whatever honest work he could find, and he would spend his money, when he earned any, on a roll. One day a kind man pulled him aside, bought him a piece of herring, and told him to get out of New York and go South.

Kabu ended up in Kentucky, working as a photographer, taking pictures of mountain-folk who probably had never seen a photograph, and definitely had never seen a Jew. They came down from the mountains just to look at him, to see if he had horns.

He took photographs when he could, and expanded his business to peddling as well. His wanderings led him to West Virginia, where he met my great-grandmother, Bina Turk, called "Savta" (Hebrew for Grandma) by her grandchildren. She'd come to America with her father in 1914 to visit her much older brothers, who had been living in this country for years, and who had become successful. Savta's father had a hard time in America, though; his sons were not living a traditional Jewish lifestyle. And so he went back to Poland. At the request of her brothers, who were so much older than Savta, and who wanted to get to know her, Savta stayed. Originally she'd planned on staying only for a month or two—her mother had died in childbirth, and she was raised by her older sister and her father—but then World War I broke out, and she was stuck. She never saw her father again.

LOOK!

In accordance with the Jewish custom to remember the needy during the

Passover Season

Mr. and Mrs. Harry Appleman will give away on Friday, April 17, at the Evarts depot

A Car Load of FLOUR

The Flour will be given away as long as it will last. A 24 pound bag to a family. All needy from Evarts and surroundings are welcome regardless of

Color and Creed

Savta had a hard time living with her brothers and their wives. She wouldn't eat any of their food. Even the bread had lard in it. When a hard-working, honest, kind Jewish peddling photographer showed up at her brother's door, it was a match made in heaven. Eventually a wedding day was set. Savta was to wait for Kabu by the train station in West Virginia, where they would marry, and then move to Kentucky.

I thought of them on my own wedding day, at the Sheraton Crossroads, in Mahwah, New Jersey. I imagined Savta in her modest wedding dress, waiting for Kabu, in 1920 in West Virginia. While she waited, the small crowd was getting restless. Kabu was late. And then very late. And then even later. It was getting dark and cold, and Savta had already mapped out a plan in her head. She would move to Philadelphia. She would run away from this town and the disgrace of being stood up on her wedding day…but then he arrived, on horseback. The train that should have passed

Above: V&K Coal Company. Clover Gap Mine, Lejunior, Harlan County, Kentucky. Courtesy of www.angelfire.com/ky2 harlanphotos.

Right: from Knoxville Tennessee newspaper, Thursday evening, December 24, 1931.

Opposite page: Newspaper advertisement, April 1932.

Did Without Car To Give Needy Flour, Indictment Reward

Strange Case of Applemans of Evarts Told By Kentucky Commission; 'We Don't Like Your Giving Flour,' Said Prosecutor.

Editor's Note: This is the second of seven articles presenting the high spots of a 1200-page report by a commission appointed by the then Gov. Flem D. Sampson to investigate conditions in Harlan County. The commission only recently completed its investigation and was unable to present its report until the day before Sampson was succeeded by Gov. Ruby Laffon. Altho Simpson did not have time to act on it, the report is expected to come before the next session of the Kentucky legislature.

By JOHN T. MOUTOUX

For 12 years Mr. and Mrs. Harry Appleman have been operating a general merchandise store at the little town o Evarts in Harlan county. It was to Evarts that coal miners flocked and took their families last spring when they were fired for joining the union. Their only source of income sud denly cut off, the miners lived on the little that aid committees would bring in from adjoining counties.

Testifying before former Governor Flem Sampson's commission was Mrs. Henry Appleman, 38-year-old mother of four children. She was born in Poland, and came to America when a child, was educated in Virginia, and later naturalized.

"Did you and your husband distribute a carload of flour here?" she was asked by one of the commissioners.

A—We did.

Files Circular

Q—Will you file this circular and make it part of your disposition.

The circular read:

LOOK

In accordance with the Jewish custom to remember the needy during the Passover Season, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Appleman will give away on Friday, April 17, at the Evarts depot a car load of flour.

The flour will be given away as long as it lasts, a 24-pound bag to a family. All needy from Evarts and surroundings are welcome regardless of creed

its probative value lies in the detail of circumstances she relates. The commissioners taking her testimony were greatly impressed by her sincerity. It is the testimony of a good and truthful woman."

(TOMORROW: "Red raids" by deputies created reign of terror in mining towns of Harlan County).

WOMAN CHOSEN ARMS DELEGATE

Miss Woolley First of Sex to Be So Honored.

By Associated Press

WASHINGTON—The success of American feminism stood at new heights today thru the selection

Harlan County, 1920. Mining territory, with two opposing camps: the coal miners and the mine owners. The miners were basically enslaved to the owners of the mines. They worked hard physical labor, day in, day out, and were paid in scrip that could be exchanged for food only in the Company Store—owned, of course, by the mine-owners. The coal company had its own police force, used to keep union organizers out of the coal camps and to intimidate miners who tried to join the union. Throughout the 1920s and well into the 1930s, Kentucky coal producers did everything in their power to prevent unionization, earning Harlan County the name "Bloody Harlan."

In the midst of the Great Depression, in 1932, the miners in Evarts went on strike. They wanted to be unionized, and they refused to work until they were granted that right. Cheche remembers the miner's children coming to school barefoot. The owners of the mine, like the Bible's Pharaoh, had hearts as hard as stone, that hardened at each request made by the miners; they would let the miners starve to death rather than allow them to join the union and gain their freedom. The town was basically at war. Bullets flying in the streets, riots and vandalism.

By this time, Savta and Kabu had four children, they'd opened a clothing store and were making a living. Savta baked her own bread each week, and the family ate fruits and vegetables and grains—they still kept strictly kosher. Twice a year they could afford a chicken, which was ritually slaughtered according to Jewish law and sent to them from Cincinnati. Savta and Kabu were extremely well respected in Evarts. Kabu was famous throughout the county for his honesty and kindness, and had even been asked to be a member of the town court. He refused—he said he didn't want to make decisions that would affect people's personal lives—but the judge said to him, "Mr. Appleman, if you were to be tried, wouldn't you want a fair trial?" "Yes, of course," he answered. "Then you will sit on this court," the judge said, "for you are a fair and honest man." And he did.

Savta and Kabu had been saving up money over the years to buy a car, and finally had enough—$5000 dollars. A fortune. But people around them were starving. Children didn't have shoes on their feet. They were not political people, but they could not live surrounded by such without doing what they could to help. And so in the spring of 1932, they opened a soup kitchen, and put an ad in the paper which read: "LOOK! In accordance with the Jewish custom to remember the needy during the Passover Season, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Appleman will give away, on Friday, April 17, at the Evarts depot, A Car Load of Flour. The flour will be given away as long as it will last. A 24-pound bag to a family. All needy from Evarts and surroundings are welcome, regardless of Color and Creed."

They spent every last penny they had saved for that car on flour—flour! And they gave out bag after bag after bag. There was such joy in the town. The joy of giving and receiving with honor—the joy that transcends the particular, and enters the realm of the universal—the realm of the human. This selfless

Above: PV&K Coal Company, Clover Gap company store. Courtesy of www.rootsweb.com/~kyharlan.

Right: Bina Turk Appleman, Harry Appleman and their children, (from left to right) Freda, Toby and Joe, 1928.

generosity had such an impact on the people of the town that when Cheche, the nickname for my grandmother, Freda Miriam Appleman Aranoff, visited there with her siblings years later, she was amazed to find that young boys in Evarts, Kentucky were named Harry Appleman, after her father.

The coal company wasn't happy, though. They bombed the soup kitchen in the middle of the night, sent bullets flying through the windows of my great-grandparents' house, and then came to indict Kabu for criminal syndicalism—supporting the miners and aiding their strike against the company. The next day Savta went to court to defend her husband. In an editorial from 1932, in B'nai B'rith Magazine, Savta is quoted as saying, "The Jews have a holiday that is Passover. And on that holiday, whoever is hungry must be fed, even if he is a stranger. We were taking no sides, this way or that, in the strike, but when people are hungry, should it be said to them: no you are strikers, and we can give you nothing to eat? There were so many children that had no bread…" The case made its way all the way to Governor Chandler of Kentucky, who called Savta a "woman of valor," and said that hers was the testimony of "a good and truthful woman." But at the time, the company store owners continued to shoot through their windows. The entire family escaped to West Virginia in the middle of the night, eventually making their way north to Brooklyn, where the teenaged Cheche was teased for her southern accent, and where Kabu had to start from scratch once again.

So much movement. Roots planted only to be uprooted, and planted again.

Kabu went into the real-estate business. He got to Brooklyn, and bought a piece of land. And another, and another, and he was blessed, and became successful, so successful he was able to support children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren. The family's roots were not in a place, but in the particulars of a tradition, wrapped around words and ideas and actions rather than the hard earth.

Savta went back to school to learn Hebrew, and led a women's conversational Hebrew group at home. The family's roots were in learning, in texts and Aramaic aphorisms passed from generation to generation: '*lefum tza'ara agra*'—the degree of success depends on the degree of the hard work, and '*leit atar panui mineh*,' there is no place without God.

My family's stories have become my roots, have been woven into my identity. I have strong memories of visiting Cheche as a child. She is by no means a typical Jewish grandmother. She served me burnt spaghetti and mozzarella cheese, and scared me to death in our games of Witch, during which I'd hide, and she'd come and find me, cackling. We'd stay up late watching "The Last Emperor" on her bed, and she'd tell me about the places she'd traveled and the places that I would one day travel. In keeping with my grreat-grandmother's legacy from her Kentucky days, Cheche taught me to tip-toe into cultures and ideas that challenge my own.

Maya Bernstein has lived and worked with Jewish communities in the Former Soviet Union and Germany, and currently works as the Bay Area Regional Director for The Curriculum Initiative, an organization that serves as a resource on Judaism to non-Jewish private schools.

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Why I Became an **English Professor**

For a child of Holocaust survivors, **Shakespeare** is a **refuge**

by Michelle Ephraim

A child named Elizabeth accompanies her aunt to the dentist in Worcester, Massachusetts, in Elizabeth Bishop's poem "In the Waiting Room." When her aunt's cries suddenly burst forth from an unseen examining room, Elizabeth experiences a kind of identity crisis: "I said to myself: three days/ and you'll be seven years old./ I was saying it to stop/the sensation of falling off/ the round, turning world/ into cold, blue-black space." Elizabeth understands that her youthful frivolity is a prelude to a world of adult pain.

At 30, I too would find myself in Worcester, Massachusetts, beginning my first year as an assistant professor of English literature. Recruited to be the new Shakespeare scholar and armed with the requisite lectureships, publications and conferences, I felt confident and well groomed for the job. My preparedness came not just from years spent curled up with the Western canon but also from my particular experience as a child of Holocaust survivors. I brought to academia a desire to talk, however indirectly, about adult pain and family tragedy. In Shakespearean calamity, conveniently far removed and fictional, I found an emotional outlet for my ambivalent attachment to my family's fraught history and its own body of tragic narratives.

As an adult, I have become increasingly intrigued by my parents' escape from Germany in 1939: each was eight years old, leaving behind houses, relatives, and friends. When my father and mother later came to America from Manila and London, respectively, each brought sharp memories of public humiliations, harrowing escapes, and the family members they would never see again. Like Hamlet, for whom the standard "trappings and suits of woe" do not adequately express his grief for his father, my parents could not convey—neither to me nor to their new communities in America—the realities of what they had felt and seen.

In Washington I grew up surrounded by Jews, yet the most Jewish aspect of my life differentiated me from my friends, for whom the Holocaust surfaced only in Hebrew school lessons and on the covers of their parents' somber coffee table books. In my house, there were no such deliberate, conscientious displays: the war was a heavy, absent presence, its magnitude demonstrated and compounded by silence. Our house exuded a gravity overseen by the shadowy pictures of our family's dead on the living room mantel.

Although "Holocaust" was rarely said aloud, it provided the key explanation for my disparate family members: my cousins in Israel who spoke broken English; my father's parents in San Francisco whose thick accents and affection for marzipan betrayed a connection to the country they never mentioned; and my own parents, who whispered to one another in German late at night. While my relatives had found everything from black-hat Orthodoxy in Toronto to militant secular Zionism in Tel Aviv, my parents and I found it difficult to find our place as Jews in America. My mother, the youngest of five daughters, had rejected her Orthodox upbringing, and my father, an assimilated West Berliner, acquiesced when I insisted on buying a "Hannukah bush" and joining a nearby WASP country club. We clearly did not "fit in" at the country club, but the Conservative *shul* was no less alien. I was the only one in my Hebrew school class not to have a bat-mitzvah, a decision informed by my parents' mutual disinterest in religious faith. Yet outside the synagogue, I found the cultural trappings of East Coast American Judaism—the intimidating intellectualism, Cape Cod houses, Chinese food and Woody Allen movies—just as enviable and elusive as the girls with blond ponytails at my tennis lessons.

In Hamlet's grief and Shylock's lament, I find familiar themes of **loss and assimilation**.

Though we tried to push it aside, the Holocaust functioned as a cord that made sense of every family crisis. When our house was burglarized when I was twelve, the sight of the empty patches once occupied by sundry televisions, jewelry, and silver-plated cutlery moved my mother to sit hunched on the edge of her bed for hours like an angry little girl, her hands clenched around bunches of her skirt, inconsolable even as my father reassured her that her mother's charm bracelet, her prized possession, was safe at the bank. Everything is gone, she cried, and the only things left are worthless crap.

The mental devastation of those who have witnessed and survived the Holocaust resonates throughout the generations that come after. Although I lack the experience of "witness," the potent reverberations of the past have pushed me to seek emotional catharsis. Oddly, I have found it possible to engage

most openly with the Holocaust in the academy, in a profession often cited for its disinterested analyses, where violations of "critical distance" are usually considered taboo.

Over coffee during my first week in Worcester, a Jewish colleague remarked, as many have, about the unusualness of my situation: my youth, my parents' fortuitous—and almost improbable—late departure from Germany, and their chance meeting at a cocktail party in their late thirties. Yet he expressed greatest surprise at my choice of profession. Most children of survivors, he pointed out, entered "helping" professions, such as psychotherapy and social work. We provide salvation because we could not save our parents from persecution; most of us are not inclined to reside in the ivory tower givingrousing lectures on Shakespearean comedy and Elizabethan sonnet sequences.

But for me, the academy works well as a place to vindicate the trauma of loss and to enact a type of recovery. Despite its claim to objectivity, literary criticism provides license to make interpretive leaps that are inspired by one's own personal perspective. In the classroom, my lectures have been charged with the parallels I imagine between Shakespearean narratives and my own family stories. In Hamlet's grief and Shylock's lament for his dead wife and for his daughter, Jessica, who rejects him to marry a Christian in *The Merchant of Venice*, I find familiar themes of loss and assimilation. In Hermione's long separation from her daughter Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*, I recall all my grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles estranged from me by tragic circumstances.

With the recent Hollywood film adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice*, which stars Al Pacino as Shylock, I am reminded once again of how intimate these stories feel to me. Although I cannot claim "witness" to the Holocaust, I may speak authoritatively as a scholar with regard to another era of ethnic erasure. I am currently at work on a book about why literary representations of Jewish women were important during Shakespeare's lifetime, even though Jews had been legally banned from England since 1290. In this work, too, I am guided by personal perspective. Productions of *The Merchant of Venice* often portray Jessica as unmoved by her father's anguish. This strikes me as entirely wrong; instead, I interpret Jessica's rejection of her father as a crisis of religious faith, rather than as a blatant disavowal of her Judaism. Through such work, I bring to life Jewish women from sixteenth-century manuscripts and plays and present them on the pages of academic journals, reversing the process of erasure enacted upon my family.

At times, I still find myself like Elizabeth in the waiting room, afraid to face the full impact of loss and pain. But for me, the recognition of these experiences, whether in the context of the family or in the words of Shakespeare, provides a kind of permanence in a world that always threatens to be stolen. In the library, with neon sticky tabs and index cards, I link together the past and the present, academic research and private history.

Michelle Ephraim is Assistant Professor of English at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. She is currently working on a book entitled *Deborah's Kin: Playing the Jewish Woman on the Elizabethan Stage, 1558-1603.*

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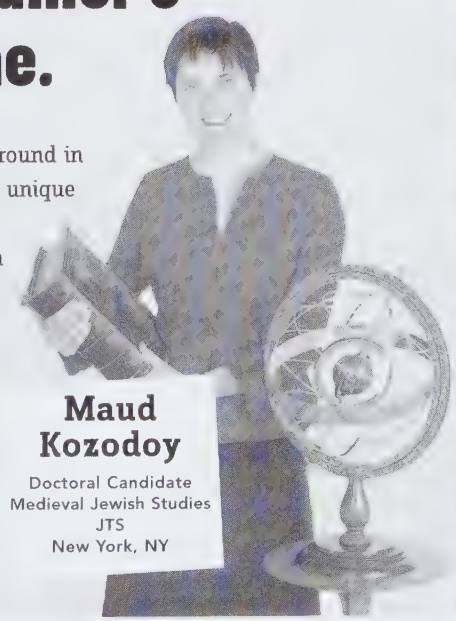

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Working the Mikveh

a short story by Amy Gottlieb

We take turns: Yehudis, Miriam, Lillian and I. The mikveh is behind Miriam's house so she gets to staff it three nights a week; the rest of us take the other three and then rotate for Shabbes. In theory, no one wants to work the mikveh on Shabbes because it's better to be home greeting the Shabbes queen, making our homes into a little paradise. We'll set our tables with linen and flowers and then put paradise on our freshly bathed bodies with clean dresses and shiny shoes. And then later, after all the food and talk, pass the kugel and who wants tea, after all the singing and table banging, then it's time for paradise between our sheets.

The more kids you have, the less like paradise. Four baths by sunset, four changes of clothes, four picky eaters, four bedtimes, and four chances you'll be too tired for a hot and holy Friday night fuck. I wasn't born into this religious ethic of guarding one's tongue, but Rebbitzen Lazar says, "don't sever who you are, Ruth," so this is how I talk, even now with all this sanctity. I'm working on it, though. I'm evolving.

I like working the mikveh on Shabbes. It's good to get away from the kids and have some quiet before dinner. In the stillness the mikveh looks less like a small tiled pool and more like a pond of sweet rainwater gathered together simply to make a person ritually pure. This is how it goes: menstruation equals dead egg, dead egg equals impurity, no more sex, count the days, visit the mikveh, soak off the world, stand before the attendant, dip once, say a blessing, dip twice more, and poof! Instant purity, body and soul. What better foreplay could there be?

I don't love immersing: the water is kind of scuzzy —but I enjoy watching each of my mikveh sisters take the plunge. When she is fully immersed, the splash of water turns to stillness and in that moment, her fingers loosen, lips part, and eyes open to all that holiness. When she's down deep, the surface of the water barely shimmers and I know she is in a womb-like embrace, no place untouched.

My mikveh sisters talk to me. After all, when someone is standing before you, dropping her towel for your inspecting eyes, she'll tell you anything. And that's how I know things, secrets I shouldn't even talk about because as Rebbetzin Lazar says, my tongue is my evil impulse. I'm working on it; I really am.

Here's what I know.

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Two of six panels from the series *1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6*, by Susan Rothenberg, 1988, Oil on wood in six panels, Each panel: 10' 6 3/4" x 46 1/8" (321.9 x 117.2 cm), The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Partial and promised gift of UBS, © 2005 Susan Rothenberg/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Batya has a tattoo on her thigh. You would think she had a wayward past like me, but she's *frum* from birth.

Batya cancels a lot because she can't wait. The law says count all the days of your menstruation, then check your underwear to make sure there are no more leaks, and then count seven more days till immersion. It's the rabbinic way, so we do it, no questions asked. Batya makes an appointment every month and then calls the answering machine and in a little sing-song voice, says, "I spotted." Now the other attendants don't know this but I saw: Batya has a tattoo on the inside of her thigh. You would think she had a wayward past like me, but she's *frum* from birth. For her, there was no summer adventure with a married man, no college years wearing sheer Indian broomstick skirts with nothing on underneath. Batya was a buttoned-up Young Israel girl from Queens who spent her teenage years in long-sleeved blouses with angel collars, learning Rashi and collecting kugel recipes. Her tattoo is very pretty: a small blue butterfly.

When Batya comes to shul she wears the biggest hats: that's how everyone knows her. Wide brims, white on black, feathers, a little black veil. She and her husband are big donors; this is not a secret. But here is what I know. Batya works for a man named Liam who owns a silk flower shop and she is in love with him. First, it was for his kindness, she said, because he let her take off for all the Jewish holidays. But then it was more. I once spied them on the BART, sitting side by side, knees touching, pinkies intertwined, her cheeks flushed. They got off the train in downtown Oakland and disappeared into a crowd. And now, when I watch Batya immerse three times, I wonder who she dips for, where her purity lives. I wonder about her often. Rebbitzen Lazar says curiosity is healthy, but to judge is only for God, so I just stay curious.

Now Chani is another story. Her heart is so pure that I think she must have a fresh bar of Ivory soap floating calmly through her frail, pale body. She spends her whole week doing mitzvos and preparing for Shabbes. Monday she reads for a blind girl at the library, Tuesday she works at a soup kitchen, Wednesday she cleans her mother's house, Thursday she holds sick babies at the hospital, and Friday she wakes at dawn to iron her husband's clothes, change the sheets, bake challah, clean a chicken, and frost a sponge cake that reaches to heaven. Just before she gets herself ready for Shabbes, she inspects lettuce leaves on a slide tray, looking for the one single insect that could render a salad as *trayf* as a lobster bisque.

But Chani has been married for 10 years, and she weeps every time she gets her period. She thinks she's not

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Chani immerses beautifully; she was born for this kind of holiness.

good enough to bear a child, not evolved enough. I tell her God is not judging her, but she thinks she is being punished because she and her husband touched before their wedding.

"We really touched," she told me. "His fingers were inside me and I had my first orgasm. Surely this is my punishment. God heard my pleasure and made a decision."

"No way," I said. "Sin and punishment don't apply to sex. Not for us."

"You know what your problem is, Ruth? You were modern before you were religious and you have no idea how I think. Surely I am being punished."

Chani immerses so beautifully; she was born for this kind of holiness. First she dips once and I declare her immersion kosher. She mutters a blessing and catches her breath. Two more dips. Kosher. Kosher. Then I turn my back to give her some privacy as she dips seven more times for all of God's kabbalistic emanations, and for the completion of the world. "My Ivory girl," I whisper to myself when she comes out, always averting my glance. With her pure face wet with mikveh drops, she goes back to the changing room, pulls on her tights, blouse, long skirt, beret, and wedding ring, and walks out to her husband's waiting car. Chani lives only two blocks from the mikveh, but her husband doesn't want her outside by herself in such a vulnerable state of purity.

Our mikveh is not some scummy Old World ritual bath like you'd find in Brooklyn or Jerusalem. This is California after all; our mikveh is in a heated log cabin set back in the woods. The buzzer on the door doesn't always work, so the mikveh sisters know that they can let themselves in and wander into the waiting room. It's a hippie mikveh in a hippie sort of town where mikveh attendants are women who listen to the Grateful Dead and bake vegan meatloaf. Many of us don't have such devout pasts, but you'd never know from looking at us now. Even the changing room checklist Lillian wrote is not your traditional litany.

Women: Bathe and soak, use a pumice stone to smooth your heels. Take a few minutes to do a breast exam. Know your body. Be sure to remove your nail polish, cut your nails, floss and brush. Use the cotton balls for earring holes and belly buttons. When you are ready, take a deep breath and relax. Find your kavanah. Remember, mikveh sisters, this is your time. Yours alone.

Believe me, this is not how it reads out there in the mainstream.

I'm not into hocus pocus. Some people say that if a great rabbi visits your town and immerses in your mikveh, the first woman to dip after him will absorb extra blessings and everything she prays for will come true. Every last wish. A certain Rabbi Yehuda immersed in Safed one morning, and the first woman who plunged that night had been infertile for 12 years and poof! Twins. Reb Yankelovich immersed in Cleveland on a Friday morning and the woman who immersed soon after learned that her orange-sized malignancy shrunk down to an olive, then a pea, then nothing. Clean as a newborn.

But I know myself. If I were the first one in, I would be down there in the tub with open eyes, wondering about the body that went in before mine. And thinking about some great rabbi's body is where I draw the line. But for others it's a different story. They want to open themselves to some kind of promise, closeness to God. And who am I to judge? Anything is possible. Sick bodies can be healed; empty wombs can be filled with hope and gestation. So when Rebbitzen Lazar left a message that Reb Gershon of Milwaukee, a direct descendent of Rabbi Loew of Prague, was coming through town on the second of Tammuz, I knew what to do. I called Miriam who called Lillian who called Yehudis and we all agreed: Chani.

"You'll be the first one in after nightfall," I told her. "The second of Tammuz, in the dark."

"There must be someone needier than I," said Chani. "Yehudis knows someone with breast cancer, Lillian's little boy has that attention deficit problem—these women need help more than I do."

"You need a child," I said. "Your goodness has to be passed down."

Men immerse in daylight; they can frolic with each other in the mikveh water and enjoy pool parties before Shabbes. But women are commanded to immerse alone, and because no one should know the details of our intimate lives we go after dark, and only after dark. Lillian says it's romantic for her to sneak off to a cabin in the woods where she can peel off her clothes and go for a meaningful dip. "It gets me in the mood," she says.

About me, there is no secret. The mikveh doesn't arouse. I immerse because that's what the Torah says, right there on the parchment. No place is hidden from Jewish law, from the space between my teeth to the food in my cabinet; from the fibers on my jacket to the hair I keep covered. Three fingers of hair are permitted to stick out of my beret, so I have some tendrils of bangs. The rest of my hair is a secret only my husband knows. Call it another prop on the stage show of life, but everything matters.

"When you inspect them for loose hairs," asked Lillian, "don't you wonder about their sex lives?"

"Of course I do. We all do."

"But when does your wondering turn to judgment?"

"Only someone not born into this

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world would ask such a question."

"Well, what about Batya?" asked Lillian. "Don't you judge her?"

"No," I said, "even though we both know about Liam."

Lillian paused. "Do you think she comes to the mikveh when she has her period?"

"What? Just to trayf up the water?"

"God forbid, but anything is possible."

"She cancels all the time. Look, with two men to fuck—"

"Ruth!"

"I'm working on it. I really am."

"You could use to dunk after the rabbi."

"No," I said. "It's all about separation and purity. We don't dunk for speech."

After nightfall on the second of Tammuz, I unlocked the door to the mikveh and turned on the lights. There was a note from Rebbitzen Lazar, saying Reb Gershon had immersed that morning and the water was in a special state of holiness. I went to the mikveh pool and leaned down, pulling my hand through the water. It was clear as fresh rain, no dirt, no hairs. I looked at my watch: Chani would come for her plunge in 15 minutes. Everything was ready: I only had to guard the expectant water. I could go down myself, I thought. Four children, a husband, my wayward tongue: life is a narrow bridge and it couldn't hurt. But hocus pocus or not, I would be searching the depths for the old flakes of skin off Gershon's body. The water belonged to Chani. Blessings were ripe for her immersion, suspended in the water like holy molecules waiting to purify every strand of her hair, surface of tooth, eardrum, armpit, cuticle. I thought about her body and got goosebumps.

I sat down in the waiting area and listened to the quiet, my eyes opening and closing in the soft light. A parade of women passed before me, first my friends from the past, then my religious friends. They passed in two different lines; no one looked at anyone on the other line. I watched my children as babies crawl along the floor between the lines of women, and then I saw them: Chani's babies, two little twin girls, pale like their mother. Chani picked them up and laid them in two wicker baskets the color of flax. She held one basket in each hand and walked in her line, perfectly balanced.

I woke to a loud splash and ran to the mikveh. The water was momentarily still but a sheath of black hair moved through the depths and a set of limbs fluttered like a jellyfish. The swimmer stayed down there for at least a minute and then popped up, gasping for air.

"I had to come. I couldn't wait," mumbled a dripping wet woman. "It's a bad time, isn't it?"

I flicked on the light. Batya stood in the water with tears streaming down her face. "I don't know whether I'm coming or going," she mumbled. "My life is such an entanglement."

She stumbled out of the mikveh and brushed past me to the changing room. I waited for her to dress and go. From the window I watched her open a car door, and her eyes were puffy from crying.

The water was cloudy and stagnant, like an old abandoned swimming pool. I used a fishing net to scoop out strands of Batya's hair. There was a small scab floating on the surface and I scooped that out too. The pull of the net brought a small wave to the surface and I watched my reflection shimmer in the murky water. It was almost the end of the twentieth century, on the west coast of America. The second of Tammuz was also a day in the month of July. It was a hot summer and I was wearing a black wool beret on my head. Not so long ago I would have looked at someone like me and there would have been no recognition. I had become a woman whose hair was buried under a shapeless hat, who was standing silently at the edge of a pool that had something to do with holiness, with paradise, with love.

This pool had something to do with paradise, with love.

Chani was ready. I inspected her in the changing room where her wedding ring was nestled on top of her beret; dental floss and cotton balls lay in the garbage pail. Her nails were freshly trimmed, her skin faintly pink from having scrubbed off the dirt of ordinary living. I pulled a loose hair off her back and she shuddered.

"I feel different this time," she said. "Hopeful. Thank you, Ruth. My prayers will fly on the wings of your goodness."

Chani stepped down into the mikveh and sighed. "It's living water," she said. "Something happened here, I can feel it." She put her arms out in front of her, plunged deeply, and came up for air. "Kosher," I said, and Chani muttered the blessing. She dipped twice more for obligation. Kosher. Kosher. Then I turned my back on her as she dipped seven more times for God's emanations, for the completion of the unfinished world. And then it was very quiet, so quiet that I could hear the sound of my own breath as it received the air. I closed my eyes and felt my body surrounded by water, as if I were immersed also. After what felt like an eternity, I slowly turned to face the mikveh. Chani was floating in the center, poised like a lily pod, her face blushing and radiant.

Amy Gottlieb's short stories and essays have appeared in Forward, Midstream, Puerto del Sol, Country Living, and elsewhere. She is at work on a novel.

The Power of Jewish Women's

by Susan Weidman Schneider

Hosting a "salon," and participating in one, is for many of us an unrealized (and often unacknowledged) fantasy. More free-flowing than a book club, not spiritual like a rosh hodesh group, nor as democratic as the PTA, or as frontal as a lecture, the salon I envisioned featured great company, a relaxed setting, a mixture of witty repartee and serious discussion about arts and politics, with enough food and drink to keep the proceedings sufficiently lubricated. Held regularly, but never routine. Intimate, but at the same open to new people.

At every talk I've given recently, when I mention that Lilith is planning to launch salons in selected cities, the room starts to hum, then buzz. It seems that salons, with their mix of close friends and "persons of renown," are a shared fantasy. You, too?

For Jewish women, excluded because of their gender and religion, the salon was doubly liberating.

It turns out that Jewish women have been the gifted creators of these magical (and powerful) gatherings for centuries. The Jewish Museum in New York has just opened the exhibition "The Power of Conversation: Jewish Women and Their Salons." Isn't the title alone enough to pull you through the museum's doors from March 4 to July 10? "The Power of Conversation" highlights 14 women who hosted these salons, from the first Jewish salonières, Henriette Herz and Rahel Levin Varnhagen in 1780s Berlin, to the salon of Salka Viertel in 1930s Los Angeles.

On at least two evenings—April 7 and 14, when the Jewish Museum is open free—Lilith hosts real-life, real time salons at the museum. Much like the salons of the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries featured in this exhibition, the Lilith salons will feature a brief reading (among them, Nessa Rapoport and Shana Penn on April 7; Francine Klagsbrun and Faye Moskowitz on April 14) followed by lively conversation. You'll be able to join in similar salons in other locations, I hope. Watch this space, visit our website for details, and sign up for Lilith's e-newsletter to find out when and where and how. Lilith magazine, independent, Jewish and frankly feminist, has been the print "salon" for Jewish women's conversations for nearly three decades, so creating live salons feels like a perfect fit.

Salons, we are told by the exhibition co-curators, Emily

Conversation

Bilski and Emily Braun, were "private gatherings that influenced the public world of arts, music, letters, and politics." They fostered social change, we learn, by bringing together people who otherwise might never meet. "Face-to-face conversation in the drawing room had the power to erode stereotypes and class privilege," the curators say, giving rise to "a new dynamic of egalitarian sociability. Central to the development of modernity, salons shaped the reception of new cultural movements and advanced early feminism and Jewish assimilation."

The salon also provided an alternative route to learning, politics and power for women, many of whom could not attend university, vote, or hold public office. The salonières took the oppoortunity not only to nurture the groundbreaking work of the men who participated, but also to compete with them. The domestic space of the home became a base of influence both for the women who hosted salons and for the guests who attended. For Jewish women, who had been excluded because of their gender and religion, the salon was doubly liberating. Jewish women today have far more access to the public sphere. But some of the same motivation drives those of us who want to create twenty-first-century salons: good company, lively talk, and a chance to mull over new thinking in the arts, science and social change (though the stars in this show were not all progressive—Margherita Sarfatti, for example, was Mussolini's lover).

The salon women fostered the careers of Felix Mendelssohn, Marcel Proust, Gustav Klimt, Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Greta Garbo, and others. Geneviève Straus's Paris salon was the launching ground for the defence of Dreyfus, and Ada Leverson in London welcomed Oscar Wilde to her salon even after his arrest, and fetched him home from prison. Some of the women are familiar to us—Gertrude Stein, for one, and Rahel Varnhagen, about whom Hannah Arendt wrote a dissertation. But of several others I knew nothing. Salka Viertel, for example, came to Hollywood from Poland in 1928, had been an actress on the German stage, reinvented herself as a screenwriter specializing in screenplays for her close friend Greta Garbo, and held weekly salons in Hollywood for "actors, directors, musicians, and intellectuals—European émigrés and refugees, and Americans as well—mixing European sophistication and Hollywood glamour. After the Nazis were defeated, Viertel and many of her guests were suspected of communist sympathies, and her salon fell victim to the inquisition of the Hollywood community by the House Un-American Activities Committee."

Who knew?

To find out more about Lilith events at the Jewish Museum and updates on plans for Lilith salons in other cities, please visit **www.Lilith.org**. For more details about the exhibition and its compelling catalog, go to **www.jewishmuseum.org**

1 "Florine Stettheimer's *Soirée* (1917-19) catches the viewer looking in through the picture window and extends an invitation to join the party. The salons held by the 'Stetties'—Florine and her sisters Ettie and Carrie—were distinctive in post-World War I New York for their artistocratic politesse and over-the-top Dada flair." Oil on canvas. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven

2 *Henriette Herz as Hebe*, 1778, oil on canvas, by Anna Dorothea Therbusch. Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin-Preussischer Kulturbesitz.

3 Greta Garbo and Salka Viertel in the German-language version of *Anna Christie* (1931). "Seated in the women's section of the run-down bar, Marthy [Viertel] and Christie [Garbo] regard each other warily, in a profound moment of on-screen communication that mirrored the off-screen affinity between the two actresses." Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

4 *Portrait of Amalie Beer*, Johann Karl Kretschemar, ca. 1803, oil on canvas. Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin, Hans-und-Luise-Richter-Stiftung.

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Leni Sonnenfeld's Pictures

an appreciation by Barbara Gingold

"Going back to a cherished place is so hazardous and can be so disillusioning and sad that I would advise never going back..." Thus writes the late photographer Leni Sonnenfeld in the personal essay that opens her book, *The Eyes of Memory: Photographs from the Archives of Herbert & Leni Sonnenfeld* (Yale University Press, $50). Yet even after her death, I disagree with her (as sometimes happened during our long friendship). For in this book she indeed creates a cherished place, a place that demands to be visited and revisited, a repository of history and of twentieth-century Jewish lives, foremost among them those of Leni Sonnenfeld and her husband, Herbert.

Born in Germany before the First World War, the Sonnenfelds met and married in Berlin under the ominous

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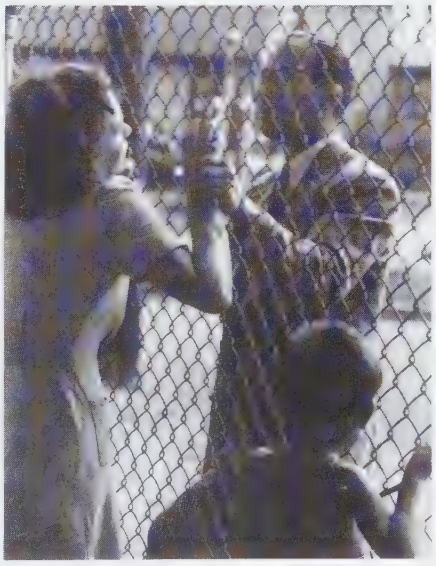
cloud of the Second. In 1933, Herbert set out for Palestine, hoping to find a new home there. Appalled by the conditions in the raw and dusty *Yishuv,* he returned to Berlin, bringing with him sensational photographs that quickly launched a new career for himself and, ultimately, his wife as well. While awaiting American visas, the Sonnenfelds documented the doomed Jewish community around them through the lens of Herbert's Leica. Their visas arrived the day after Germany's invasion of Poland in September of 1939. The Sonnenfelds made their way to New York with just four dollars, and one suitcase bulging with photo equipment and negatives.

Individual in their styles, but together in their professional success, Leni and Herbert continued photographing Jewish life for some six more decades. Herbert focused on Jewish events and personalities, many of them of historic importance, until his retirement in the 1960s. Capturing the history and drama of an entire people in intimate, single-frame increments, Leni intrepidly traveled the Jewish world until almost the end of the 20th century. Many of their pictures became icons: light streaming into a Jerusalem market in 1934; Youth Aliyah children and their parents parting forever on European train platforms; immigrants from tens of nations arriving at the port of Haifa. From the Sonnenfeld's joint archive of some 250,000 negatives—"they are our children," as Leni often said—she selected the images for the book she conceived in her 80's, "an historical memoir of two photographers."

Alas, Yale University Press did not manage to bring out *The Eyes of Memory* before Leni's death at 96 last year, but her voice and her discerning, loving eye are present on every page; in every word and picture. Despite the horrific associations they might evoke, Leni and Herbert Sonnenfeld's photographs create a real place that is not sad, not disillusioning: it is, rather, a joyful affirmation of Jewish life. ●

Barbara Gingold is a photographer who lives in Jerusalem.



Top: Old Shoes for New. These individuals were among a group of nearly a thousand refugees from the Italian concentration camps who arrived at Fort Ontario, near Oswego, New York, circa1944.

Above: Many refugees were kept at Fort Ontario for nearly two years, with no visitors permitted inside. Oswego, NY, circa1944.

Opposite, top: An immigrant from Iraq to Israel, circa1951.

Opposite, bottom: Fishermen from Kibbutz Kishon at the Sea of Galilee, Israel, circa 1957.

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Speaking the Unspeakable

LYNN MCCARTY "IN LINE", 2003. PRIVATE COLLECTION. COURTESY OF NANCY HOFFMAN GALLERY. WWW.NANCYHOFFMANGALLERY.COM

Another Secret Word

by Harriet Lerner

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When it comes to anxiety, fear and shame, the body takes center stage

—how it looks, how it functions, how it feels, how it has been cared for or violated, how it is changing, how long it will keep on keeping on. Jewish women in therapy tend to talk more open about most body issues and sexuality than other ethnic and religious groups—with one exception. One part of the female body is the location of so much anxiety and shame that it is universally deleted from the conversation.

Nope, not the vagina.

It's the vulva.

What, you say?

Yes, the vulva, the external female genitalia that includes the labia, and the clitoris. The vulva is standard female equipment. It's everything we see when we look. So why can't we name it?

Raising Vulva Consciousness

Vulva—what's that? When my friend Nancy was diagnosed with vestibular adenitis, an uncommon disease of the unspeakable parts, she called the National Institutes of Health to gather more information. She presented the facts to the woman in charge of directing her call. "Vulva?" the woman repeated querulously. "Vulva? Is that heart and lungs?"

My first serious attempt to raise vulva consciousness was directed toward my professional colleagues. After joining the staff of the Menninger Clinic, I published a paper called "Parental Mislabeling of Female Genitals as a Determinant of Penis Envy and Learning Inhibitions in Women." A case example illustrated how the failure to label accurately a girl's external genitalia contributes to shame and confusion about sexuality, as well as to inhibitions about looking and learning. The article appeared in 1974 in a prestigious psychoanalytic journal and was met with a dignified fraternal silence.

I was undaunted. I have continued over the decades to encourage parents to say vagina when they mean *that* and vulva when they mean *that*. When I ask parents why they don't tell their daughters that they have a vulva which includes the clitoris, I hear an imaginative array of excuses:

Telling my daughter about her vulva and clitoris is like telling her to go masturbate.

Vulva is a medical term. It's sort of technical. I don't want to burden her with words that her friends don't know. (This one from Jewish parents who taught their small daughter about ovaries and Fallopian tubes.)

The vagina is her sex organ. It's related to intercourse and reproduction. That's all she needs to know about.

It is true that Americans do not surgically remove the clitoris and labia, as is the case with millions of girls and women in other cultures. Instead we do the job linguistically—a psychological genital mutilation, if you will. Language can be as powerful and swift as the surgeon's knife. What is not named does not exist.

The Whatchamacallit Problem

"My husband doesn't like my vagina," Louise tells me, eyes down. "He says it's messy and complicated. It's like he needs a road map to find his way around. And I hate feeling like a traffic cop. I feel like there's something wrong or different about me that he can't find his way around."

I try to picture a messy and complicated vagina, but to no avail. My client is a professor and a scholar. She knows her vagina from her vulva. She is too uncomfortable to use the correct word, so I invite her to do so, by asking simply, "A complicated *vagina*?"

She turns red and says, almost angrily, "I'm talking about —you know—*that outside stuff*."

"You mean your vulva?" I ask.

"Yes, yes, of course," she says.

That outside stuff? Why such confused, undifferentiated, self-depreciating language for the vulva? Like most of us, Louise was raised on some variation of "boys have a penis and girls have a vagina." To quote from a popular book of the day: "A girl has two ovaries, a uterus, and a vagina which are her sex organs. A boy's sex organs are a penis and testicles. One of the first changes (at puberty) will be *the growth of hair around the vaginal opening of the girl.*" (italics mine.)

Why do we use such confused, undifferentiated language for our body parts?

Such partial and inaccurate labeling of female genitalia might inspire any pubescent girl to sit on the bathroom floor with a mirror and conclude that she is a freak. Louise had had just such a terrible youthful experience herself, as have countless other women.

Over the long course of therapy, Louise and I had had many conversations about anatomy and sexuality. When she was little, she had looked at her brother's penis with some envy because it was so neat and simple. "It was easy to figure out. No confusing and hidden parts. It was all on the outside and open to inspection." When I made the point that what she had

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"on the outside" was also open to inspection, but was never named, she responded with immediate recognition. "Yes, everyone knows that men have a penis and everyone can say the word. But the only word that people will say to describe what women have is "vagina."

The shame and anxious confusion Louise felt about her vulva persisted into adulthood. She wouldn't get undressed in a locker room if other women were present. She hated the fact that her inner labia "peeked out like a turkey wattle." Of course, heterosexual women almost never have the opportunity to get accurate visual information (that is, from comparison with other women) that allows us to appreciate our anatomical variability. As to the "what's normal?" question, vulvas differ widely in style, color, size and proportion and many include "turkey wattles."

A sexual trauma also fueled Louise's shameful feeling of being different. When she was in middle school, her father came into her room at night over a period of several days when her mother was away caring for her own dying mother. During this time her father tickled her legs and her vulva "to help her relax." She was in therapy at the time and had tried to circle around her own traumatic incident by mentioning that she had a friend whose dad may have touched her between her legs. "Are you trying to say that her dad touched her vagina?" the therapist asked. Louise clutched and said her friend was probably making it up. She changed the subject.

Louise went home and looked up the word "vagina" in the dictionary. She felt dizzy with shame and confusion. Her father hadn't touched her *there*. Was she making a big deal out of nothing? She knew the word labia, which had been defined for her as "the lips that protect the vagina." So, did this mean that her dad had merely touched the place protecting the place he shouldn't touch? Her reality, first shaken by the sexual violation, was further mystified by the absence of a shared and comfortable vocabulary to facilitate clear thinking and clear conversation.

Unless we speak clearly we can't think clearly.

When we feel prohibited from speaking clearly, we also can't think clearly. Having accurate language to distinguish the vulva from the vagina is crucial for *every* girl, even when there has been no history of boundary violations. The persistent misuse of the word "vagina" impairs a girl's capacity to develop an accurate and differentiated "map" of her internal and external genitals. The fact that a girl's own exploration of her genitals is not corroborated by information from her environment also creates body shame and anxiety about sexuality. And if sexual violations occur in childhood, inaccurate labeling increases shame and complicates healing.

The Vagina Monologues?

I've been doggedly raising "vulva consciousness" since the late 1960's, publishing and lecturing on the importance of accurate labeling of the vulva, which includes the labia and clitoris. I had reason to believe I was making progress. But when I saw *The Vagina Monologues* I felt I had fallen down the rabbit hole in Alice and Wonderland. Here was a play whose purpose was purportedly to restore pride in female genitals—including pride in naming—and it could not have been more obfuscating of genital reality.

Playwright Eve Ensler has made enormous contributions to women. It's not Ensler, but rather her audience I want to focus on, the tens of thousands of women and men who watched the play, or listened to the conversation surrounding it, and pretended that nothing was amiss—or worse, didn't *know* that anything was amiss.

How can this little two-syllable word, vulva, be surrounded by such fear and confusion? Freud himself recognized the anxiety that the vulva seemed to inspire, and recalled a passage from Rabelais in which the exhibition of a woman's vulva put the devil himself in flight. Psychoanalytic theorists believe that male castration anxiety is one source of the fear, noting it's the "hairy maternal vulva," and not the vagina (which is invisible to inspection) that may give the impression of a "wound" and may arouse in little boys fear that his penis may be lost.

Freud's theories aside, one might posit that the vulva is so threatening because it is the primary source of female sexual pleasure, the girl's first site of masturbation and sexual self-discovery, separate from intercourse or reproduction. Many parents are quite anxious about acknowledging that their young daughter is a sexual individual who has curiosity about and pleasure with her genitals, and the general societal dread and denial of female sexuality has been well documented.

Some years back I started the V-Club with some wonderful women associated with The Women's Therapy Center in New York City. As president of the club, I invite all of you to become members. The criterion for membership is simply to use the words "vulva" and "vagina" correctly, and to encourage others do the same. Sorry, there are no membership cards, T-shirts or buttons. But if you meet the criterion for membership you'll be a shame-buster, giving more power to women—which is also a gift to men.

Remember, to be larger than fear and shame we need to choose language, clarity and self-definition over silence and mystification. We owe it to ourselves, and to girls and women of all ages, to use the right word. If you can see it, it's a *vulva*. Say it out loud.

Harriet Lerner, Ph.D., is the author of *The Dance of Anger* and many other best-selling books. This piece is adopted from her latest book, *Fear and Other Uninvited Guests* (forthcoming in paperback as *The Dance of Fear*).

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G-ma and Me

Continued from page 48

We're both sociable, but we like our own space. We both pass out at around 10 o'clock most nights, and both of us sleep like the dead. We have almost the same tolerance (or intolerance) for alcohol. After just one or two drinks we get tipsy, relaxed and giggly. A couple of nights a week, we eat dinner together and drink a beer—Grandma loves a lager—in front of the T.V. while watching "Seinfeld." Grandma can't follow all of the show's improbable story lines, but she always laughs in amazement and says, "They're so *nutsy*!"

Occasionally she likes to play up the Granny routine. One Thursday night (our unofficial "date" night) we were at the end of a long line at the movies. G-ma suggested I ask the people up front if my "Old Grandma" could jump the queue. When I got the go-ahead from the head of the line, my grandmother did an Oscar-worthy rendition of Little Old Lady. With a faux slumped back, she hobbled up to the front and even tied her silk scarf around her head, à la Old World babushka. We chortled at her performance the rest of the evening.

G-ma's good nature extends into her neighborhood, something I never knew before. She's on a first-name basis with at least two dozen waiters, shopkeepers, street peddlers and bank tellers. When we're on our way to a joint manicure-pedicure appointment and we run into Esther from Burger Heaven or Shawanda from the bank, they're always delighted. "Your grandma is the best," they tell me.

Seeing G-ma's routine close up, I can understand her more disjointed thought fragments. When she starts talking about "the store with all the beautiful things," I know she means Bolton's, a cut-rate women's clothing store. When she says she went to "the funny man" for lunch, I know she means the bagel store up the street where the proprietor has ludicrous pictures of himself with celebrities all over the walls. Sometimes she'll pick up a sentence halfway through a thought, leaving out the subject and time frame, and by now I can guess with 90% accuracy what she means. She might suddenly ask, "When am I supposed to go?" and I'll somehow know she's asking about her next visit to the dentist.

I don't share Grandma's love of shopping, but one night I was giddy from a new purchase, a striped vinyl handbag. Even though the bag was far from her style, I could see Grandma appreciated its good quality and vivid colors. I swung the bag in my hand and put on a CD of early Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet and other oldtime jazz greats. Grandma, who still gets her honey-colored hair styled every week, started humming, and then singing words to instrumental tracks that I had no idea had lyrics. Turns out she knows the songs from her girlhood. When I started dancing, Grandma stood up and moved her hips and arms and tapped her slippered feet to the sultry horns. She smiled and chuckled without any of the stress that accompanies her memory loss. She wore a guilty smile. "You know," she said, pointing at me, "I think you're drunk from that bag." She was right. I was a little high from my purchase, but more from the joy of dancing with her.

Relatives think I'm some kind of saint for putting up with G-ma's repetitive 60-year-old family stories and her uncanny knack for asking me a question precisely when I pick up the phone to make a call. But when I tell contemporaries—particularly my women friends—that I'm living with her, the response is excitement tinged with jealousy. I've been surprised to find out how many women wish they could have (or could have had) the chance to live with their grandmothers. By a fortuitous accident of timing and real estate, I have had the incredible luck of getting to know my grandmother as a pal, not just as my mother's mother.

While I'm in no hurry, I am starting to long for a home that is truly mine. But now that G-ma has adjusted to life with me, I'm concerned that it'll be more difficult for her to adjust to life without me. We're going to miss each other dearly. While we'll still get together often, I won't be able to watch the TV news with Grandma over breakfast each morning or see her flamboyantly kick her shoes in the air when she comes back from a long walk in the neighborhood.

Living with my grandmother has been a treat provided, unwittingly, by New York City's inflated real estate market. I'm grateful.

Elizabeth S. Bennett is a journalist in New York City.

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Autism Moms

by Cynthia R. Harp

I had heard of Suzanne long before I met her. She introduced herself one morning when we found ourselves volunteering in the kitchen of the Jewish Day School. "Oh, Suzanne," I told her. "I know who you are. It's a small Jewish autistic community."

And indeed it is. I live in a Jewish community of approximately 10,000, and I have discovered an underground society therein: mothers of special needs kids. Many of us have embraced our Judaism with a traditionalism not seen in our individual family trees in many generations. I am the first woman in my family to go to the mikvah since my great-grandmother went. I began soon after my son's diagnosis, and I felt both forgiven (as if there were such a thing necessary) and able to forgive—G-d, for making Griffin's life harder than I wanted for him; myself, for struggling with the concept; and my life up to that point, which had left me woefully unprepared to confront anything more serious than the angst of a grape-jelly stain. My journey had begun, and I, the reluctant traveler began the journey.

After a grueling period of fertility treatment (the irony of which, at age 27 and a marriage of five years, was not lost on me), I had Griffin. Max arrived 13 months later.

When I was able to pull my head out of the toilet after two years of near-constant pregnancy, the most interesting sights were my children. Griffin, however, was undergoing some odd development, or undevelopment, really. He gradually stopped the cheery chatter and halting first words he had accumulated before Max's birth. Riddled with guilt and hormones, I watched our sunny toddler regress so slowly that we were unable to see the full impact. I enrolled Griffin in preschool the following year. His teacher loved Griffin, but was concerned with his lack of speech and social progress. With some reluctance, we had him evaluated, and our odyssey began.

I sat in yet another doctor's office one day, waiting to hear her prognosis of Griffin. "Now, I work a lot with the Jewish Day School," she said, mispronouncing the name repeatedly. They must not like her, I thought, or they would have told her how to say the name of the school. I wanted to stop her and say, "Listen, lady. Just tell me if he is f—ing retarded, and while you're at it, if I am, too."

My head ached from the effort of helping our son get through pre-school, which was considerably more effort than I had put out into my college career (sorry, Dad).

It was not to be. We were told, very gently and politely and with great compassion, that Griffin could not come back to his pre-school. We got on the carousel of the seven levels of hell that all parents of kids who are "a little different" find themselves taking. In the meantime, both boys went a few days a week to the Lubavitcher summer camp while I hunted down options.

Griffin was assigned a special counselor who took care of only him. He loved camp, she loved him and I loved her. I began to learn with her. As the youngest of 11 and a yeshiva girl, she had a lot to teach me. She went back to New York at the end of the summer, and I wandered into the Partners in Torah study group in my area.

I met Harriet in Torah study. Harriet listened silently while I confided in her about my oldest son. She did not, like so many others had at play group or pediatrician's offices, tell me about

Listen, lady. Just tell me if he is f___ing retarded.

What if one of the People of the Book can't read the book? Or runs in circles flapping his arms while the rabbi davens?

her genius children and how they struggled to teach others calculus in kindergarten. She did not say, with false revelation, "Oh, I guess I am lucky that my children have no issues." Instead, she introduced me to her friend Cassia, who became my parent advocate, negotiating the tangle of educational services with me. Together, they formed a human lifeline that led my husband and me to schools and services for Griffin. If saving any one person truly does save a whole world, then what does saving a family accomplish?

The words of thanks are too vast, polysyllabic and choked with gratitude for my family to articulate them. We do the next best thing. We try to help others. Every time I take a call from a worried parent, I feel a rush of love for the universe and the people in it who helped me. If being a parent advocate is taking part in *tikkun olam*, then it is the best part I know.

The teachings of the Jewish texts, the real teachings that aren't gilded in gold with the benefactor's name over the door, teach us: Help each other. Value your children. Teach them to swim, so they may someday save themselves. How could I have ever taken that to be only a literal directive to go to the pool?

Artists

Dror Mishori (page 32) and Adi Schwartz (this page) live at Kfar Ofarim, an Israeli residence for autistic children and adults, where Judith Firstater (now retired) was their first painting teacher. Their work is reprinted here, with permission, from the Hebrew picture book for children, *Yesh Li Haver V'Hoo Aher* (I Have a Friend and He Is Different) by Edna Mishori, published by ALUT, the Israeli Society for Autistic Children. **www.alut.org.il** The book and its artists have won a prize from the Israel Museum.

Is it a coincidence that I met Harriet and Cassia through the Jewish world? I don't think so. By the kind of good fortune that makes me believe in *hashgacha pratit*, or Divine Providence, I am part of a weekly coffee klatch that is both group therapy and social outlet. One woman tells the story of her older daughter screaming at her youngest daughter to hurry up or they would be late for school. The youngest daughter, Sarah, was the most profoundly deaf child ever to be born in our hospital. Esther knew that as well as anyone else who knew Sarah. But, life rolls on, and school starts on time no matter what your disability.

One mother told us recently that her daughter had had "such an LD moment at Sunday School. The kids were supposed to count as many *mezzuzot* as possible in the synagogue. Her daughter's group came back with the highest number. The teacher commented, 'I didn't know we had that many *mezzuzot*.' The daughter said, "Well, we went to the gift shop." Talk about thinking outside the box!

Of course, the "box" of social comportment has its place. This "place," however, can be decided on a broader scale than most of us were raised to believe. A few years ago, Griffin used the momentary lull in the Torah service one December Saturday morning to shout, "Santa Claus!" Everyone—including the rabbi—laughed for a full minute. A small part of me wanted to stand up and announce at length how we do not celebrate Christmas, nor drink in the morning (although it had appeal to me at that moment). The part of me not part of the small part, however, thought: How cathartic. That needed to be said.

My frustration has since turned to gratitude for G-d and life giving me the amazing gift that is Griffin. Yet, I feel sure that my Judaism, renewed as an adult, is a major component of both how I deal with special needs in the early twenty-first century and how Griffin sees the world.

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At the end of an appointment with a Hindu pediatric behavioralist, the doctor turned to me and said, "Have faith in fate." It was a bizarre thing for her to say, in a bizarre setting for her to say it. Yet that was the most helpful, comforting advice I'd heard.

Many in my "underground" society of Jewish-moms-of-special-kids have also renewed their Jewish practices and beliefs. I know several who went from twice-a-year synagogue visitors to traditionalists who learn Torah on Monday nights. I am slowly moving toward the latter, but I was certainly one of the former. We used to stand together at the park on days our Jewish pre-school closed for what were (to us) obscure holidays, trying to figure out what Shavuot was, anyway.

There is no place like the Jewish community for labels. I have had few conversations outside my realm as parent advocate for special needs kids and their families that do not begin, "My son/daughter…is really so advanced…" This sentence used to cause my entire emotional system to either shut down or melt down, depending on how the day had progressed thus far. Now, I focus my energy on not rolling my eyes.

In retrospect, I suppose I was naive not to see the dark side of being part of "the People of the Book." We are blessed to be part of a tradition that sets such value on education. But what if a member of the people of the book can't read the book? Or wants to read it in Braille, or while sitting on the floor of the sanctuary, or run in circles and flap his arms while the rabbi davens?

The upside of labels, of course, is finding our place in the world. I am a mother. Judaism, despite the patriarchal dogma, venerates the mother. I truly believe I am here, right now, right here, to take care of my children. I truly believe in the specificity of that, that I am here to take care of these particular children. There is an old saw—not necessarily a Jewish one—that everyone picks his or her own parents. I used to tell my husband that Griffin chose us because his soul knew we could help him. Now, I truly believe he chose us because he knew he could help us. He has opened my heart in ways I was not aware were possible; he has given me joys I never knew enough to miss.

I would love to say that every parent of a special-needs child I have ever met in the Jewish community is happy, well-adjusted and sitting around the mah jongg table telling amusing anecdotes on their home lives. Alas, I can't. I see suffering souls every day who are both being made to feel and make themselves feel guilt, shame and despair that they have a child with a "problem." I make an effort every week to tell them I am available to talk, advise, cry and lead them gently to those things that will make life bearable.

The hardest part of hearing the diagnosis of autism was that there is no real prognosis. The term autism itself is something of a garbage-can term. There are innumerable characteristics that can be called autistic-like, and if a person is judged to exhibit a certain number of them, they are on the autism-spectrum scale. Kids change rapidly and in unexpected ways. That is true exponentially for the special-needs child. So who knows what tomorrow will bring? At my first parent advocate training class, the leader told us: "I know why you are all here. It is the same reason we all are here. We each have at least one kid with special needs. So I know that it can be a beautiful, sunny day and suddenly, all hell can break loose. So I will not tell you to turn off your cell phones."

Until I accepted that understanding, I had a very modern American perspective, I think. I looked forward. I planned: vacations, summer camps, paying for medical school.

Autism forces me into the present. For one thing, as a toddler, Griffin could and did have my mail off the table and shredded into the garbage (or toilet) during the leisurely 60 seconds it took me to walk from the garage to the kitchen. Not only did philosophy force me to be alert to the present, but health, well-being and preservation of mailed checks demanded it.

Judaism helps us stay in the present – that seemingly New Age axiom – through ritual practice and prayer, among other ways. One of my favorite prayers is the *Shehechiyanu*. Thank you, G-d, for giving me life, sustaining me, and allowing me to reach this moment of pulling paper towel rolls out of the overflowing toilet. The thanks are real. Being the mother of my boys defines me and forces me to be who I am, and who I have to be. My father once told me, "Those guys who got medals for saving lives on the battlefield, they didn't want to be there. They were drafted to be there, and they decided to do what they could to save somebody." It was the most meaningful comment anyone had made, and the most poignant. In all ways, having Griffin saved me. When I tuck my boys in every night, I tell them that their daddy and I prayed to have babies, and G-d gave us them. G-d gave us the very people we prayed for, exactly who we needed. We mean it.

> Every day, souls feel guilt, shame and despair that they have a child with a "problem."

Going to the mikvah is another way Judaism helps me stay in the present. It is my own personal Rosh Hashanah; it is at least the *rosh* of the month for me. When I am submerged in the water, without any external artifice, I am able to strip away my internal artifice as well. There is something about being down to my most basic element that forces me into the here and now. I do not worry about the grocery list, nor how Griffin will do at his bar mitzvah in five years. I go under, I rise up. I welcome another month. That is all I need to know. And by focusing on what I need to know, each moment, I am able to meet each moment fully.

I am here, and so are the bundles of love, wonder and dirt that are my children. Suburban angst, unsorted laundry and mismatched socks (usually mine) fade away effortlessly when I embrace, literally, the blessing of the details of my life. What more can any religion give us than that?

Cynthia Harp is a stay-at-home mother with many volunteer positions: at InSource, an organization that provides support and assistance to special-needs children and their families, at her synagogue's Sunday School, at Jewish Federation apartments for the well aged, the PTA and Hadassah. Prior to having children, she worked in advertising.

Fanny Hurst used her celebrity to support **racial equality** and rights for women.

One hundred years ago at the typewriter...

Does the name **Fanny Hurst** mean anything to you? Between 1910 and the mid-1930's, Hurst was one of the most popular, influential and highly paid writers in the United States. Her name on a magazine cover virtually guaranteed a sell-out of the issue. Today, she is remembered, if at all, for the 30 movies of her works, including "Imitation of Life," "Back Street" and "Humoresque."

Hurst was a celebrity whose daily life made headlines, and she used that celebrity to support racial equality and rights for women. When it was far from fashionable, her writings were soapboxes from which to decry anti-Semitism, racism, sexual harassment, denial of worker rights and the urban poverty she personally explored.

Few writers today can match Hurst's eventual output: 17 novels and over 250 short stories, most now out of print and only sporadically available in libraries. The Feminist Press has given us the welcome gift of a representative collection of 18 Hurst short stories, *The Stories of Fanny Hurst* ($16.95), edited and with an edifying introduction by **Susan Koppelman,** an authority on the women's short story in the U.S. A new generation of readers can judge for themselves whether, as many scholars have argued, Hurst is entitled to her place in the canon.

In many ways, the stories Koppelman has assembled reflect the trajectory of Hurst's own life. Born in St. Louis to assimilated (and, some say, anti-Semitic) German Jews, Hurst attended Washington University and then moved to New York in 1909. Both St. Louis and New York City serve as settings for the stories in the collection. Thanks to Hurst's diligent research in the airless sweatshops and crowded tenements of New York's Lower East Side, her work portrays with photographic accuracy the minute details of life's daily struggles for the working poor, especially women.

On the surface, Hurst's stories have problems: labyrinthine sentences whose syntax is befuddling, florid figures of speech that cry out for a stern editor, and dialect and slang that feel as outdated as the hula hoop. And to some tastes, the stories will feel overwrought, but passion should not be mistaken for mere sentimentality. Hurst's abiding empathy for common people thrown back on their own resources still feels fresh and powerful.

Hurst's plots pay homage to Saki, O. Henry and de Maupassant, moving forward with a compelling momentum that is often stunning. In "The Story of Life" a faithful husband destroys himself and his wife by his obsession for their young ward. "Forty-five" tells of a beautiful daughter who blithely usurps her fading mother's place in a romantic relationship. In "The Brinkerhoff Brothers" the symbiotic relationship between two brothers, limned in haunting detail by Hurst, is forever altered when one of them marries late in life.

The collection will help you remember why the short story once laid such claim on the imagination. Here are tales of Jews attempting to assimilate by bobbing their names; the scourge of TB that echoes the AIDS epidemic of our own time, and women's precarious balance of home and career. Always there are fresh surprises to take away: an unexpected twist at a story's end, a perfect detail that brings a moment in the past to life, a poignant encounter between mother and daughter or lover and lover. These are stories rich with the stuff of life. They still have lessons to teach us about the glories and mysteries of the human heart.

—Faye Moskowitz

A hidden French treasure

Irène Némirovsky, dead of typhus in Auschwitz in 1942, has won France's prestigious literary Prix Renaudot this year, the first time ever that the prize was awarded posthumously. Her extraordinary multi-part novel *Suite française* was an immediate best-seller last year in France, even before it won.

Born in 1903 in Kiev, Némirovsky and her wealthy parents fled the Soviet Union for France in 1919. Her first novel in French, *David Golder* was published when she was 26, and with it her writing career soared, until her arrest and deportation in 1942. Her daughters-Denise, 13, and Elisabeth, 5, survived, aided by the governess their mother had instructed—and paid—in advance. They carried with them from one hiding place to another a suitcase, its only contents the notebooks in which Irène Némirovsky had written all day long, until she

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was forcefully detached from them on July 16, 1942. She died in Auschwitz of typhus a month later, at 39. Her husband, Michel Epstein, followed her; he died in a gas chamber on November 6, 1942.

It would take 62 years for those hidden notebooks to be published. In the French edition of the book there is a photo of one of them, each page filled with minuscule script in order to save paper and ink. One can only be moved by Némirovsky's economy and the urgency to pour out her story before time would run out. Her daughter Denise, who typed the manuscript for publication, needed a magnifying glass to decipher the words, a labor she began in 1975. Amazingly, until then the daughters had thought the notebooks were a journal, and so couldn't bear to read them.

Having come through illness and hardship, after the war the daughters went to the Hotel Lutétia in Paris searching for their parents among the survivors gathered there. Elisabeth [Gilles], the younger daughter, died shortly after she wrote an imaginary biography of her mother (*Le Mirador*, 1992). Denise [Epstein] lives in Toulouse. A meeting with Myriam Anissimov, known for her monumental biographies of Primo Lévi and Romain Gary, was the catalyst for Denise to publish *Suite française* rather than depositing the manuscript in a library.

The first volume, *Tempête en juin*, speaks about the exodus from Paris during the first hours of the German occupation. The reader follows the itineraries of these people from different social milieus in their panic to leave the capital, with its roadblocks and bombings, hunger and injuries. The second volume, *Dolce*, recounts the arrival of German troops in the town of Bussy and the budding romance between the daughter-in-law of the bourgeoise whose home is confiscated and a German officer who lodges there. The books have not gone through the fine cutting and editing Irène Némirovsky was in the habit of doing. We are reading, essentially, a first draft; *Suite française* was supposed to be a five part epic novel inspired by *War and Peace*. How moving to read the elaborate scaffolding for the three sections she never lived to write. One of her notes shows the care she took for details: "What I need: an extremely detailed map of France or a Michelin Guide" and "A treatise about porcelain; Birds of June, their names and songs."

I've been haunted by the book. I'm waiting for the books of Irène Némirovsky still out of print to to be reedited in the near future thanks to the success of *Suite française*. I know she is not tender with Jews in these novels, and many thought she fed the anti-Semites with her self-hating descriptions of Jews in which all the sterotypes parade in print: hooked noses and frizzy hair, sallow complexions, money-hungry cheaters. Nevertheless, she is the writer who couldn't escape her fate. She certainly died a Jew.

English speaking readers will have the chance to appreciate the *Suite française* late in 2006, when it will be published by Alfred A. Knopf with the excellent and well-informed preface of Myriam Anissimov.

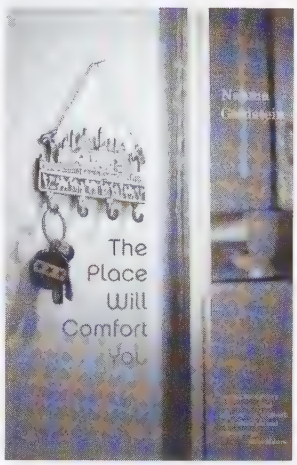
—Susie Morgenstern

Transplants, in Israel and America

The title of this intelligent collection of short stories by **Naama Goldstein,** *The Place Will Comfort You* (Scribner, $22), is ironic. The place referred to is the land of Israel, to which one does not merely immigrate, but to which one "ascends." And one does not simply decide to leave, but to "descend." Appropriately, these are also the book's two section headings. The phrase in Hebrew is also the traditional one addressed to someone in mourning, using the ritual name of God as "place": "*Hamakom yenahem etkhem....*"

The irony is apparent in the very first story, "The Conduct for Consoling." A trio of third-grade girls pays a shiva call to a classmate whose mother has just died. As instructed, one of the girls uses the title phrase as her parting gesture. The "orphan," though, is not comforted by these words. She immerses herself in other words: a detailed description of the American features of the narrator's birthday party. The narrator is confused and then pleased that her family's oddness is seen as better than the native fare. The tension between oddness and attractiveness, between misunderstanding and belonging, binds these eight stories.

In the first five, an American family "ascends" to Israel to become a part of the realization of the Zionist dream of return. They live as Israelis do, but remain American: "It is as if you were raised somewhere very different then put down here," the narrator of "Pickled Sprouts" laments. "You've been raised on mac and cheese," whereas everyone else is eating schnitzel and chopped salad for lunch. The mostly female protagonists inhabit this



They live as Israelis, but remain **American.**

Our Reviewers

Eleanor J. Bader, coauthor of *Targets of Hatred: Anti-Abortion Terrorism* and a frequent contributor to progressive, feminist publications, is a teacher, writer and activist.

Yael Flusberg is a writer and activist living in Washington, DC

C. Devora Hammer has written for The Washingtonian, The Forward, Los Angeles Jewish Journal and, of course, LILITH.

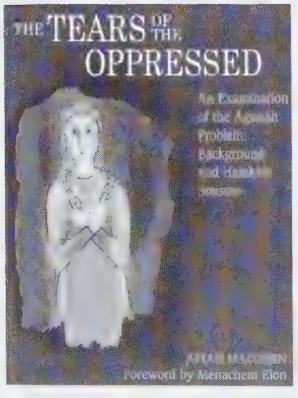
Ilana Kramer is a graduate student in gender politics at New York University.

Born in Newark, New Jersey, **Susie Morgenstern** met her French husband at Hebrew University and followed him to Nice, where, she reports, she is celebrating her 60th birthday and 60th children's book. She has a Ph.D. in comparative literature from the University of Nice.

Miriam Sivan, a former New Yorker, lives in northern Israel and teaches at the University of Haifa. Her short stories have appeared in Lilith and elsewhere, and she is currently working on a novel.

Faye Moskowitz, professor and chair of the George Washington University English Department, is the author of four books and the editor of a collection of writing by Jewish women.

Miriam Stone is the author of *At the End of Words: A Daughter's Memoir* (Candlewick 2003). She lives in Brooklyn.



awkward space between cultures. While uneasy, they are also enriched by it.

In "Anatevka Tender," the first story of the "and Descending" section, an American mother leaves Israel with her two sons and moves to a Maryland suburb. Her eldest is suffering post-traumatic stress disorder from a tour of active duty in Lebanon. After pages of chuckling and identifying with linguistic and cultural mistranslations, in this story the national divide between Israel and the U.S. is no longer a matter of interpretation, but one of real substance. *The place* will not comfort this family. It plagues them. And as Americans, they feel they have options: to "descend" but to be spared the horrors of war.

Goldstein's protagonists are lost in translation, both in Israel and in the United States. There is no easy comfort to be found in her richly written stories, only the important and intriguing questions of identity, expectation, and belonging.

— Miriam Sivan

Women's right to divorce

It's odd to have a coffee-table book about *agunot*, women who can't get Jewish divorces, but *The Tears of the Oppressed: An Examination of the Agunah Problem: Background and Halakhic Sources* by **Aviad Hacohen** and **Blu Greenberg** (Ktav, $39.50) is exactly that. With its large, glossy cover and elegant text, I am assuming the publishers wanted to distinguish this book from the myriad of others on the same topic while highlighting that the *aguna* issue is central to the struggle for women's rights in Judaism.

Menachem Elon, eminent Israeli judge and legal theorist, gives an excellent summary of the topic in his foreword to the book: Both Jewish marriage and divorce are matters of private contract between the husband and wife, and must be transacted at the free will of both parties. Therefore, if a husband refuses, or is unable to give his wife a *get*—a Jewish divorce—she remains chained to him until he frees her. If she has relations with another man without having received her divorce, she is considered an adulteress, and any children from that second man are *mamzerim*, marked for life as unable to marry within the mainstream Jewish community.

One unique contribution of this book is the reproduction of several responsa (Jewish legal opinions) relating to the *aguna* issue. Many of these responsa are here translated into English for the first time. However, the reproductions are of such poor quality that some are almost illegible, a real shame.

Another interesting contribution is the explanation by Aviad Hacohen of how rabbis in the past dealt with the "chained wife," a situation usually caused by the man's disappearance. He also proposes a legal solution to the problem today, namely, that any transaction, including a marriage transaction, is invalid from its inception if based on a mistake. Hacohen wants to use the Talmud and other sources dealing with the "mistaken transaction" to allow Jewish courts to annul marriages when the woman wants to be freed of the bonds of marriage but the husband will not do it of his own free will.

This is not a new idea, nor is it likely to receive widespread acceptance. However, if we are to find solutions to the aguna problem, they will have to be community-wide, because as soon as someone casts aspersions on a woman's marriage status, the pall of the *mamzer* hangs over her children.

—C. Devorah Hammer

Pay attention to these poems

Female Jewish poets continue to nourish our souls with words to inspire, to relate, to tell truths, to voice pains, and, most importantly, to speak our stories. The works produced in 2004 were no exception. Here are some highlights:

Striking the balance between penetrating observations and sharp wit, *So Far, So Good* (Sivan $12.99) by **Karen Alkalay-Gut**, is at once easy to read and poignant. In "Morning Science," a woman has a casual conversation with Freud over cereal. "I am not even awake and he is already into me/ about my hysteria and the need to tell all my secrets to our friends." Yet despite their clever tone, her poems dig deep under the skin of modern life. In a poem about hunting for an apartment in Tel Aviv, she writes, "there is still/ something of the sand, of the beach, the red clay/ from beneath the sidewalks, the earth/ that first created the human form." Whether illuminating everyday experiences or touching the larger

truths, the poems in this collection confirm that Alkalay-Gut is a writer of distinct capability and breadth.

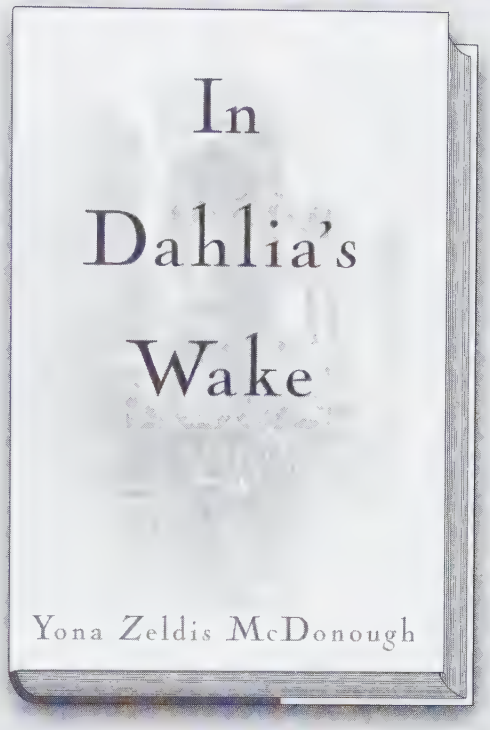
Yosefa Raz's unique personal story gives weight to the poems in *In Exchange for a Homeland* (Swan Scyth Press, $14). From frontiers as diverse as her childhood home of Jerusalem, to her service as a Hebrew teacher and border guard in the IDF, to the struggle of a family coping with a father's sexual identity, her words transport the reader without leaving the realm of the familiar. In "Fantasy for a Gay Father," she writes, "I will open myself as easily as opening a window." It is with this ease that she draws the reader into the world she inhabits. Though her poems occasionally drift from their center, their evocative imagery and colloquial style keep the reader along for the ride.

Fall (Wesleyan U. Press, $19.95) by **Amy Newman** is a unique collection; each poem takes its inspiration from one of the dictionary definitions for the word "fall." The first section follows a narrative about Adam and Eve's fall and exile from the Garden of Eden. In the second, a body falls ill and declines to death. Eloquent and haunting, the poems in the third section dance around the noun "fall," or autumn. In the poem "A downward movement or slope," the narrator observes falling leaves: "Though air supports the slow descent, the spiral of their questionings,/ the evidence is all abstract: my testing, loving, curious kingdom,/ my lucky days, my strange existence, pale and thin in search of God."

The stark poems of **Rachel Zucker** provide a refreshing alternative to most confessional women's poetry. At times heavy with disappointment, *The Last Clear Narrative* (Wesleyan U. Press, $13.95) explores marriage, pregnancy and motherhood. Underlying her striking descriptions is a pervading sense of loneliness, as if the speaker is always looking from the outside. However, this does not detach the words from their subject; rather, her poems stretch from their compact core towards a dream of clarity.

—Miriam Stone

The new novel from *Lilith*'s fiction editor
YONA ZELDIS McDONOUGH



In this powerful, intensely moving novel about a couple trying to rebuild their lives after the death of their child, Yona Zeldis McDonough brilliantly explores the ache of loss and the desperate desire to find a remedy.

Praise for *The Four Temperaments:*

"A fascinating, deeply human novel."
—*People*

"A skillfully orchestrated page-turner."
—*O, The Oprah Magazine*

On sale April 19, wherever books are sold.

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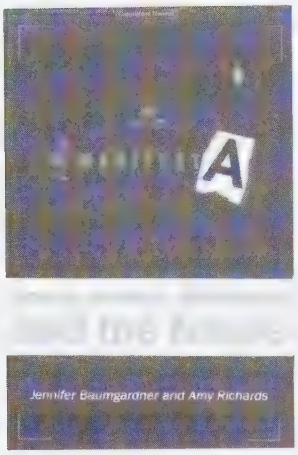
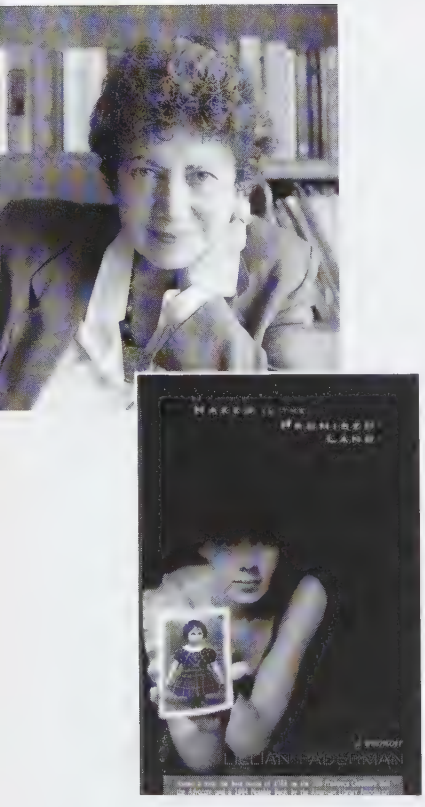


The urge to get out and DO something

When **Jennifer Baumgardner** and **Amy Richards** were touring the country to promote their first book, *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism and the Future,* audiences repeatedly asked what they could do to "make things better." This book, *Grassroots: A Field Guide for Feminist Activism* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $14), attempts to answer that question by offering strategies and tactics to aspiring agitators. The book's premise is simple: everyone can do something to make the world more egalitarian, more humane.

"An activist is anyone who accesses the resources they have as an individual for the common good," they write. "It's not who you are but what you do." This means that one need not be a vegan, tree-hugging socialist to effect change. Indeed, even corporate wonks can get involved. In fact, you need not even call yourself a feminist. Labels, they write, are less important than actions; if you believe men and women should have equal social, political and economic rights, it doesn't matter if you eschew the 'F' word.



This view makes *Grassroots* a comforting book. Examples of actions big and small also make it a terrific resource. We read, for example, of Patricia Beninato, a Virginian who got so sick of hearing anti-choice rants about Post-Abortion Syndrome—a medically-specious condition said to plague women after abortion surgery—that she founded imnotsorry.net. The website gives women who have had positive abortion experiences a place to sound off. Another enraged and engaged woman is Lois Abraham. After reading about President Bush's decision to withhold $34 million from the United Nations Family Planning Agency, she emailed her friends and asked each to send $1 to the beleaguered agency. She further asked them to email everyone in their address books. In short order, 34 Million Friends of UNFPA was born. To date, the group has raised more than $2.5 million.

Although *Grassroots* includes scads of inspiring stories, the book's greatest contribution is a 60-page appendix, which provides contact information for organizations working on issues from stopping domestic violence to closing sweatshops. Although the book would have benefited from a deeper discussion of risks—tweaking the status quo can lead to questioning by police, or even arrest—it is nonetheless an essential resource for anyone who wants to do something but doesn't know how to begin. Baumgardner and Richards encourage us to move from kvetching to action, so that "the frustrated goodwill of ordinary people" will inevitably improve the human condition.

— Eleanor J. Bader

Memory Against Forgetting

Despite the "memoir explosion" of the mid-1990s that supposedly saturated the market, the memoir continues to be one of the most popular nonfiction reading choices.

Jewish readers' attraction to memoirs, I suspect, may be more for their use of "memory against forgetting," to borrow a notion from Milan Kundera. Perhaps this is because Jews understand the power of memory not only to heal wounds, but also to reinterpret history—even personal history—in new ways. Three recent memoirs do just this.

In *Naked in the Promised Land* (University of Wisconsin Press, $26), a young **Lillian Faderman** dreams of becoming a child star in order to save her fragile immigrant mother from the drudgeries of the garment factories. Instead, she works her way through high school and college as a pin-up girl and burlesque performer. Along the way she becomes a woman who loves other women, some of whom will remind readers of the tragic caretaking-and-rescuing relationship Faderman has with her mother or, alternatively, with the loving but distant one she has with her adored aunt "My Rae."

Thankfully, the young Faderman never completely defines herself by her line of work. Eventually, and strategically, she positions herself to become a faculty member at Cal State during the 1960s, when few women in academia had such power. As a revered feminist scholar, excavating and exposing stories of the Other—women, lesbians, Hmong, Chicanos—

Faderman proves artful at doing the same with her own story.

If memory is the mother of muses, then a Jewish woman's relationship with her mother is often key to understanding who she will both become and refuse to become. As with Faderman's tale, **Natalia Rachel Singer's** *Scraping By in the Big Eighties* (University of Nebraska Press, $24.95) is a memoir of a daughter trying both to reconcile with and to escape from her mother, who in this case suffers from an incapacitating and aggressive mental illness. Singer alternatively takes care of—and tries to escape from—her mother, a woman who intermittently tries to sabotage, burn, stab, and strangle her two daughters and her own aging mother.

Scraping By not only tells the story of a unique mother-daughter relationship, but also reveals Singer's quest to find a way to live creatively and meaningfully during the materialistic 1980s. She did not originally set out to write about her own life. "I wasn't ready to tackle that woman in the stained red stretch pants with red lipstick smeared across her teeth," she writes. Yet, while "denouncing the values of our soon-to-be-labeled yuppie generation," and verbalizing the great ironies of her life during the 1980s, coining terms such as "Deja Voodoo," for instance, or referring to work as "Group Death." Singer manages to make readers ask themselves how place and policy and intimate relationships shape a woman's life. *Scraping By*, an ambitious work, could have benefited from deleting some of the chapters that add little to the more gripping story of the mother-daughter relationship, but its best moments are riveting social and personal commentary that are well worth the read.

Susan Jane Gilman's *Hypocrite in a Pouffy White Dress: Tales of Growing Up Groovy and Clueless* (Warner Books, $12.95) is, at first glance, the least serious of these three and the memoir most likely to have commercial success. Hip and hilarious, these essays explore issues ranging from race- and class-based playground politics to children being held hostage by their parents' odd and repeated attempts at self-improvement via transcendental meditation, macrobiotics or interior design. Gilman's powers of observation give her the remarkable ability to inhabit her younger self fully and honestly, and provide her assembly of characters with dead-on dialogue. I would have been a freshman at Stuyvesant High School in Manhattan with Gilman when she was a senior, and my younger self could have delivered easily any of the unsentimental, tough, sincere lines Gilman ascribes to fellow students. Gilman, who's dying to lose her virginity, begs a friend to tell her what it feels like. She replies: "Like I'd impaled my twat on a hockey stick."

Humor moves this narrative along. Gilman learns about Judaism on the fly as a reporter at New York's Jewish Week newspaper, carving out a niche for herself by covering the "freak beat" (single lesbian rabbi mothers, anyone?) while writing frankly about the transformative experience she had participating in the March of the Living in Poland.

These three page-turners, written by women of different generations and sensibilities, will help Lilith readers remember why they love memoirs and perhaps cause them to reflect on their own complex relationship to their Jewish identities.

—Yael Flusberg

My year in Berlin with Regina Jonas

Fraulein Rabbiner Jonas: The Story of the First Woman Rabbi by **Elisa Klapheck** has just been published in English (Jossey-Bass, 2004, $24.95) in a translation by **Toby Axelrod.** Here is the story of how that translation came about.

I first encountered the dark-haired, robed figure of **Regina Jonas** in 1997, at the "New Synagogue" in former East Berlin. In a glass display case in what had been the synagogue's main sanctuary stands a postcard photo of Jonas, ordained in 1935. I stopped. It was a shocking introduction, in black and white, to the first woman ever ordained as a rabbi. Young. Stern looking. Exuding an aura of spirituality. Her expression gentle yet

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direct, she seems to look out into the large room, daring passersby to stop and engage.

I was surprised to learn that the first woman to wear rabbinical robes was German, not American. I knew of Sally Priesand's groundbreaking ordination by the American Reform movement in 1972. But Jonas' story was new to me. I read the flyer announcing a Havdalah service she was to lead, in this very space, in 1938. And I read that this young pioneer in Jewish education for women had been murdered, together with the promise of her generation, in Auschwitz.

I encountered Regina Jonas' spirit again in 1999 at the first conference in Europe for female rabbis, cantors and Jewish educators. Now, in a new wing of the synagogue where Jonas once spoke, another generation of ordained women prayed together and shared ideas for rituals marking milestones in women's lives. Whether they knew it or not, these women were guided, inspired and applauded by Regina Jonas.

Conference co-founder Elisa Klapheck

I'd never known that the **first woman rabbi** was **German**, not American.

was by then already working on her biography of Jonas, digging through the archives of the Jewish community. I understood that she was following her own spiritual path, somehow in Jonas' footsteps. Ultimately, the stories of Klapheck and Jonas would braid together, and I would become the third strand. In 1999, Klapheck's biography of Jonas, together with Jonas' 1930 treatise, "Can Women Serve as Rabbis?" was published in Berlin. Four years later, Klapheck asked me to translate the book into English.

Translating Klapheck's writing—and the introduction by Hermann Simon, director of the Centrum Judaicum, New Synagogue Berlin—was a relative breeze. If I had any questions, answers were a phone call away. But Jonas' text was another story entirely. Naturally, she had written in the florid style of the 1930s; not always direct, with obscure word usage, and sentences that were long even by German standards. I often had to confer with Klapheck. Together, we deciphered many convoluted passages, consulting a photocopy of Jonas' typed manuscript, often while consuming quantities of black coffee or red wine and freshly baked baklava.

Gradually it began to feel as if Regina Jonas herself was in the room with us. We found ourselves discussing her *halakhic* points, marveling over her complex, occasionally witty arguments and enjoying the self-assured tone with which she would conclude a section of her treatise.

"I love it when she says, 'Enough with examples!'" Klapheck would laugh. Jonas must have been getting tired toward the end of her writing, we thought.

Jonas included numerous quotations in Hebrew and lengthy Talmudic citations in

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German. Toward the end of the year, I often found myself in the Jewish Community Library on Fasanenstrasse in former West Berlin, poring over the Artscroll and Steinsaltz English translations of the Talmud, checking the accuracy of my translations.

Sometimes I would read way beyond the passages that Jonas had cited, exploring the richness of the Talmud for the first time. As a child, I had watched my paternal grandfather, a rabbi, reading his Vilna Talmud, peering down at the yellowing pages through clear-framed glasses. Now, I understood better what those blocks of text represented.

Seldom when working together were we overcome by the facts of Jonas' fate. But once, Klapheck handed me a copy of the last known letter to Jonas from her lover, Rabbi Joseph Norden, who was about to be deported from Hamburg to Theresienstadt, the concentration camp in Prague. I translated the words, written on July 13, 1942: "The time has come to say goodbye... Maybe Berliners will be sent, too. In that case perhaps there will be a chance for us to see each other again..."

The copy of the letter was like lead in my hand. There is no evidence that the two were reunited. Norden died in Theresienstadt, and though Jonas was deported there with her mother, they later were sent to Auschwitz and murdered.

But for us, Jonas was somehow alive again through her work.

I began to understand more deeply Klapheck's insistence that Jonas' tragic death was not the story. Klapheck felt sure—and I agreed—that Jonas would have loved meeting those Jewish women who, whether they knew it or not, had followed in her footsteps.

—Toby Axelrod

Swimming with—and against—the tide

The year is 1909 in Vienna. Austrian sports clubs have just outlawed Jewish athletes. In response, the Jewish community creates a Jewish sports club of its own: *Hakoah* (strength, in Hebrew). Its women swim team thrives; by the 1930s Jewish women are competing for spots in the Olympics. But in 1938 the Nazis shut down the club, thus ending the Olympic hopes for the Jewish Austrian athletes.

In his film "Watermarks" (Kino International, 2004), Israeli filmmaker **Yaron Zilberman** spotlights eight of these now-octogenarian champion women swimmers, interviewing them nearly 65 years later at home, at work, and in social settings around the world. And then Zilberman arranges, and films, a reunion in Vienna. After success at film festivals, the film is now being shown commercially.

Magnetic with the women's girlish memories of early romance, team loyalty and their own robust athleticism, "Watermarks" also speaks to the much greater issue at hand: that Hakoah literally saved these women's lives. Just before the war broke out, in order to protect its Jewish athletes Hakoah's functionaries organized an escape operation, relocating the athletes in countries throughout the world, necessitating their leaving behind parents, families, lovers and friends. At its essence, this film marks the accounts of their escape from the tragedies of Jewish Vienna, the difficult reestablishment of each of their lives, and the bonds that kept the team in touch across the globe throughout their lives. Zilberman clearly relishes the stories of these " cheerful and proactive" women. In the film's last scenes, he gathers them, graceful swimmers still, for a final swim together in the still-lovely old Hakoah pool.

—Ilana Kramer

Changing Jewish laws about women?

Orthodox feminists live with a conundrum. The revelation of Torah at Sinai, the foundation of their belief, occurred more than 3,000 years ago, when equality for women was unimaginable. All subsequent Jewish law and literature derive their authenticity from that event, and the further we are from that time, the less significant any authority or text is considered to be.

So what are we to do with a tradition that always gives the greatest weight to its sexist past? Many in the Orthodox world either deny the need to equilibrate the gender scales, claiming that the denigration of woman is part of God's plan, or try to show that the system is not sexist. Orthodox feminists, in contrast, recognize the inequality in Judaism, and try to reform the religion from within.

In her new book, *Expanding the Palace of Torah: Orthodoxy and Feminism* (Brandeis University Press, $29.95), **Tamar Ross** does a superb job in describing the forms of discrimination women suffer in Judaism: their unequal obligation to perform *mitzvot* (commandments), inability to participate in public ritual, dependent personal and family status, and inequality in marriage and divorce laws. This section of Ross' book, as well as the one in which she describes

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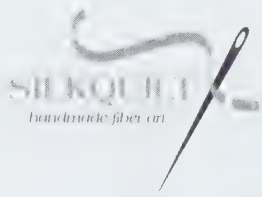

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the first stirrings of feminist consciousness amongst Orthodox women, is the best I have read on the subject.

Ross goes on to describe the impact the agitation from Orthodox women has had on Jewish law. Based on her understanding of Jewish legal philosophies, she explains how Orthodox authorities have responded to the challenges of feminism. Unfortunately, her forays into jurisprudence are simplistic for the professional, yet far too detailed and confusing for the lay reader. Her forced placement of "modern" Orthodox responsa into one philosophical box and "ultra" Orthodox into another fails to capture the rich diversity of Jewish law.

In her analysis of "Third Stage" feminism, or the stance that Jewish sources can never be exorcised of their sexism, Ross brings up theologians such as Rachel Adler, and neo-paganists such as Jenny Kien. Also included are those who try to depatriarchalize the Bible and rewrite the prayer book. The ideas for reform range as broadly as the sources of sexism. Ross makes the critical point that those who wish to relativize and rewrite the Torah rob it of its value. "Torah can function as the source of a living religion based on passion and commitment only to the degree that it makes some compelling appeal to truth and a connection with the divine."

So what are Orthodox feminists to do with an intractably sexist system that claims it is unchangeable, yet sits uncomfortably with modern notions of justice and morality?

Ross draws on Rav Kook's idea of "cumulative revelation" to find her own answers to these difficult and uncomfortable questions. Kook was the spiritual leader of the Religious Zionists, a group that broke radically from the past and from its contemporaries. Kook's philosophy allowed Revelation to be a continuous process, an idea that Ross believes can help navigate to the conflict between Judaism and feminism. If modern authorities are given weight, feminist voices will be able to participate in the continuous process of interpreting Jewish law.

Although Ross' idea has some appeal, I would question its persuasiveness to those who will carry the mantle of tradition into the next generation. Jewish tradition is pragmatic and fragmented; each legal decision is made based on the facts at hand and the learning of the rabbi who has been asked the question. Our law and literature are like an archaeological dig into all the places and eras Jews have lived, and we find fossils of other civilizations littered throughout our tradition. The women's question will be added, more or less slowly, onto the ever-growing archaeological mound of our tradition. It will be incorporated inconsistently, unexpectedly, and without a solid theoretical framework. Though the contributions of Ross and other feminist scholars are intellectually interesting, they are unlikely to be the catalyst to cause change in Jewish law and society. The triggers will most likely be the increasing education of women, the growth of their political power, and, most important of all, their economic power in the outside world. ●

—C. Devora Hammer

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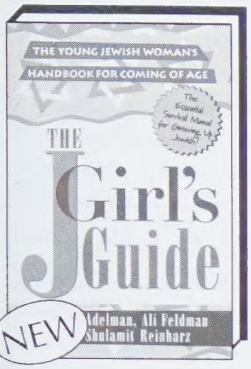

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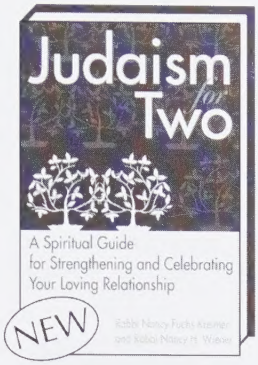

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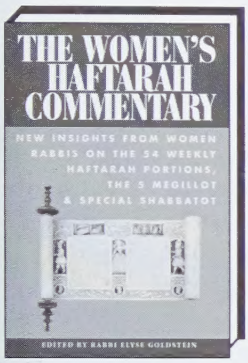
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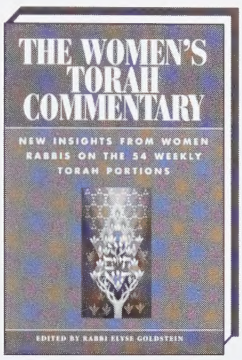
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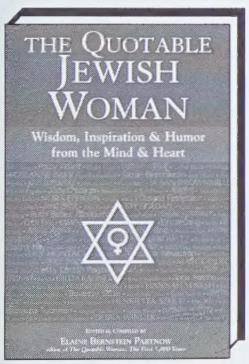

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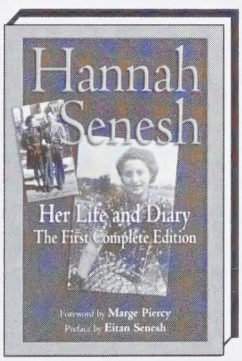

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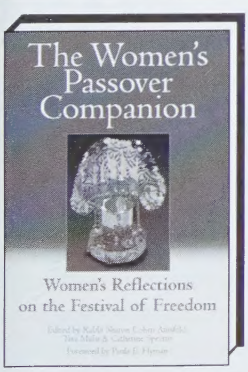

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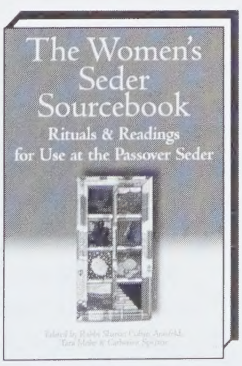

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Sex Aher 05: The words, in scrambled Hebrew and English, mean "other sex." The event is the **Fifth Gay and Lesbian Studies and Queer Theory Conference in Israel** May 8-10. Look for programs on intersections of sexuality and gender, and ethnicity, class, and nationality. Since it's the 100th anniversary of Sigmund Freud's "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," there'll be a special session dedicated to queer readings of Freud.

Shirley Kahanovich, Tel Aviv University Women Studies Forum coordinator, wsf@post.tau.ac.il

The Jewish Contribution to 20th-Century American Art is celebrated in an exhibit that includes many works by women: **Diane Arbus, Judith Brodsky, Helen Frankenthaler, Helen Levitt, Lisette Model, Louise Nevelson, Nancy Spero** and **Florine Stettheimer.** Through April 17, at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum, 224 Benefit Street, Providence, RI.

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DIANE ARBUS. *TEENAGE COUPLE ON HUDSON STREET, N.Y.C.* 1963. © 1967 THE ESTATE OF DIANE ARBUS LLC

The photos of Diane Arbus (1923-1971) are on view in the exhibit **"Revelations,"** originated by the San Francisco Museum of Art, on view at the Metropoltan Museum of Art in New York through May 30. *metmuseum.org*

"The F-WORD" is the working title of an incipient magazine for high school and college aged readers "where feminists will be depicted as fiercely smart, and sassy ladies," **Melody Allegra Berger** tells us. She's a Temple University senior and women's studies major and is looking for writers, web designers, artists, and cartoonists who'd like to work on this project with her.

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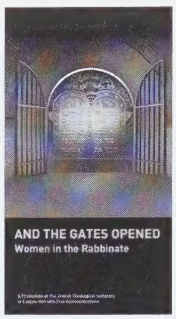

The film **And the Gates Opened: Women in the Rabbinate** documents the history of women entering the rabbinate and the impact they've had on contemporary Jewish life. Created by the Jewish Theological Seminary and produced by **Marianna Mott Newirth**, the 60-minute film is $35 from (212) 678-8902; or viewable at the JTS library. It will be screened as part of an evening celebrating the 20th anniversary of women's ordination as Conservative rabbis, followed by a discussion, moderated by **Abby Joseph Cohen**, featuring rabbis **Nina Beth Cardin**, **Amy Eilberg**, **Susan Grossman**, **Joel Roth** and **Gordon Tucker**. March 29 at 6:30 at JTS. Admission free, reservations required.

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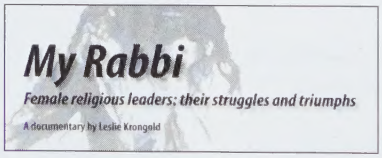

My Rabbi, an indie video by **Leslie Krongold**, tracks the struggles and triumphs of six women who became rabbis against great odds. **Laura Geller** in Los Angeles, one of the first Reform women rabbis, narrates. **Margaret Holub** works with a rural Jewish community in Mendocino, California; **Shoni Labowitz**, raised in an Orthodox family, came back to Judaism after exploring Eastern practices; after working with Jewish communities in Russia, **Einat Ramon** returned to Jerusalem to promote liberal Judaism; **Linda Holtzman** left her more conservative congregation to work with the gay and lesbian community in Philadelphia; and **Sue Elwell** teaches and studies Talmud.

MyRabbi.info

Settlement Houses to Olympic Stadiums: Jewish Women in American Sport. Who knew? Historian **Linda J. Borish** and filmmaker **Shuli Eshel** have teamed up to trace the early years of prominent American Jewish female athletes and sports administrators, up until the induction of the first class of women into the 2003 Jewish Sports Hall of Fame. Featured in their film will be **Charlotte Epstein**, the mother of women's competitive swimming, and **Senda Berenson**, who in the 1890s developed the first rules for women's basketball. Current athletes include LPGA professional **Amy Alcott**, Olympic gold medal skating champion **Sarah Hughes**, and ESPN sportscaster **Linda Cohen**. You can support completion of the film via Maccabi USA/Sports for Israel, writing JWAS Documentary in the check memo.

linda.borish@wmich.edu

Lev Eisha (The Heart of a Woman) is L.A.'s mostly monthly Shabbat morning service led by **Rabbi Toba August** and **Cantor Cindy Paley**. Tailored specifically to women, their service is attended by about 120 women who sing, dance, share, shake their tambourines, learn Torah, and eat together. The several hundred members on their e-mail list come from all branches of Judaism, and include a few men, and even a couple of non-Jews. On April 3 this year they will hold their first women's seder, together with the synagogue's Women's League.

Congregation Adat Shalom, 3030 Westwood Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90034; leveisha.org

Midreshet Yom Rishon for women is an opportunity for New York women of all ages, Jewish backgrounds, and educational levels to participate in Torah learning on Sunday mornings with Yeshiva University'smale and female faculty. The program parallels a series for men and accommodates working people who want to learn during the weekend. There is no fee for participating. To download learning materials, to view the weekly schedule of speakers or access audio recordings of each *shiur* (lesson), visit *midreshetyomrishon.org.*
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You Are Not Alone: Solace and Inspiration for Domestic Violence Survivors Based on Jewish Wisdom, by **Toby Landesman,** is small book that's a large resource for survivors, for those still trapped in abusive relationships and for the Jewish community as a whole. This pioneering collection is for those who want to heal themselves or help heal others in a Jewish spiritual context. $18 plus shipping from the publisher, Faith Trust Institute. *(206) 634-1903*
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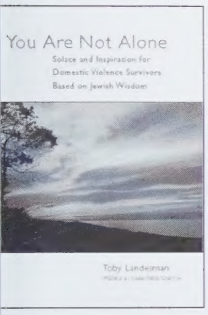
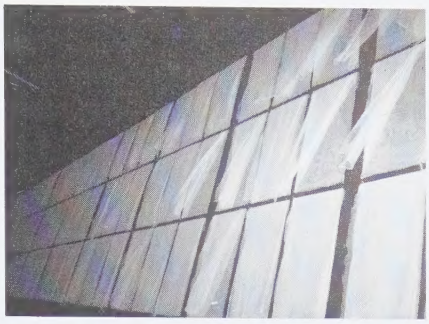


NYC RAPE MAP.ORG™

Safe streets initiative. Responding to a spike in rapes in her own Brooklyn neighborhood, activist **Nancy Schwartzbaum** has launched a website where women can exchange information on the safety of their streets, in the spirit of the Safe Haven project for schoolchildren in the 80's. From the information submitted, the site is constructing an online map detailing safer routes for women to walk. Local businesses have joined in the effort, which plans future expansion to all the boroughs of New York City.
nyc-rapemap.org

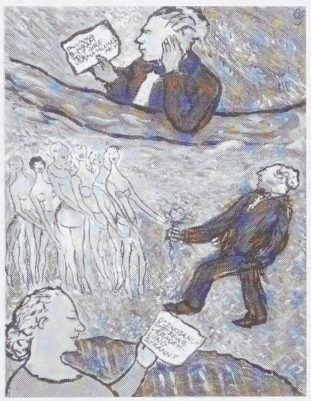


Mirror Covering (for Dobsche.) An installation created by **Helene Aylon** for the first International Lodz Biennale in Poland consists of 81 mirrors, covered with gauzy fabric blowing in a breeze, and recalls the ritual of covering mirrors in a house of mourning. "Dobsche" notes Aylon, "was my great aunt who in 1942, in Schvenzany, Poland, stood in front of my cousin Manya, her 16 year old daughter, as Nazi soldiers were advancing to rape the girl. Aunt Dobsche got shot dead and Manya fled into the forest." Manya was found by a gentile neighbor who hid her until the end of the war. The installation is available to travel. *Helène Aylon: (212) 924 4133; heleneaylon@aol.com*

Poumy is a lyrical documentary in which 92-year-old Alsatian-born **Andree "Poumy" Moreuil,** recounts how as a young mother she escaped the Nazis and joined the French Resistance in WWII. The 30-minute video, in French with English subtitles, directed by **Sam Ball** and produced by **Marian Scheuer Sofaer** is available from *Citizen Film, 415-260-1880; citizenfilm.org*

A Guide to Conducting Life History Interviews *with American Jewish Women, In Our Voices* is edited by **Jayne K. Guberman**. In addition to technical guidance on recording and obtaining permission, scholars have provided thought- provoking essays, among them: **Paula Hyman** on family, **Pamela Nadell** on education, **Hasia Diner** on work, **Dianne Ashton** on community serice, **Karla Goldman** on Jewish identities, **Jenna Weissman Joselit** on home and place, **Riv-Ellen Prell** on leisure and culture. Photos by **Joan Roth**. Available from the *Jewish Women's Archive. jwa.org*

Listen to Her Voice: The Ma'yan Report shows that the American Jewish community and its organizations remain far from a level playing field for women. Led by **Tamara Cohen**, this study found that Jewish organizations continue to limit women's access to power and leadership; the Jewish community has failed to adequately respond to the diversity of Jewish women and their families; and feminism has had a highly positive impact on Jewish women's religious lives. Available from *Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project, mayan.org*



Charlotte Salomon, Life or Theater? While living in exile in Nice during the war, the talented young painter from Berlin, who died at 26 in Auschwitz, created an epic series of autobiographical paintings that she titled "Life or Theater?" In recent years an exhibition of her work was on view in Western Europe, Israel, Japan and the U.S., her story inspired a biography and a play, and now filmmakers **Esther Hoffenberg** and **Richard Dindo** have released their film "Charlotte: Life or Theater?" which uses hundreds of her luminous gouaches, with excerpts from her autobiographical writing read by French actress **Ann Gisel Glass**. First Run/Icarus. *frif.com/new2004/clot.html*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

www.Lilith.org

G-ma and Me

by Elizabeth S. Bennett

My grandmother and I are roommates.

Eight months ago, my fiancé and I broke up suddenly—in Chicago, where we'd been living—and when the relationship ended I wanted to move back to New York. My friends, my family and even my job were all there, but the impending struggle to find an apartment was totally overwhelming. I wasn't in an emotional or financial position to commit to a lease, and though friends offered temporary couches, I figured that as long as I was nomadic I'd continue to experience those unsettled post-breakup feelings.

When my parents suggested that I stay with Grandma for a couple of months, I was intrigued, but hesitant. At Grandma's, true, I would be able to have my own comfortable room and an easy commute to work. But how would this odd-couple pairing really work? I was 30 and used to living with someone my age. Grandma was a month shy of 85 and hadn't lived with anyone since my mother's stepfather, her second husband, died eight years ago. She was also fairly set in her ways, and I wasn't sure how she would adjust to living with me, but her reaction was delight: "*Of course* you can stay, Lizzytisch!".

> By a coincidence of romance and real estate, I have the incredible luck of getting to know my grandmother.

Frankly, I hadn't thought much about our relationship before I moved in. I'd gotten to know this loving and opinionated clothes-hound through years of holiday gatherings, family parties, museum excursions, and restaurant-cum-theater outings. Over the decades, very little had changed in Grandma's pastel environment—the peach-colored candlesticks on the sideboard, the kitchen clock with its fading photograph of croissants. I thought: continuity like this sounds like just what I need in my life right now.

By late spring, when I moved in, I wasn't the only one needing some support. Grandma's memory, failing for a year or so, was starting to deteriorate more rapidly, leaving her at times frustrated and upset. These lapses were upsetting to me too, because Grandma had always been a very sharp and self-possessed woman, and rather formal (never a day without a skirt and hose).

At first it was strange to be living with G-ma (pronounced *gee-ma*; this is what I've always called her). But it turns out, wildly enough, that we have surprising qualities in common.

Continued on page 31

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